00099235

00099235

Digitized with financial assistance from
Shri Brihad Bhartiya Samaj
on 20 February, 2020

ON LIFE'S BY-WAYS

ON LIFE'S BY-WAYS

99235

BY

PIERRE LOTI

MEMBER OF THE ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE

TRANSLATED BY

FRED ROTHWELI

LONDON

G. BELL AND SONS, LTD.

1914

N N- 2- 74

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

PIERRE LOTI is an impressionist who cares little for psychological analysis. In this work, now offered to English readers, we have presented to us a series of word-pictures, showing forth the uniqueness of his style, at once disconnected and fascinating. We see the pictures he describes through a sort of vague, fleeting mirage, though possessed of a degree of charm, a power of evocation exercised by few living writers.

Loti is the type of the artist traveller, a mighty realist who transmits to his readers the very thrills and emotions through which he has himself passed. Caring little or nothing for literature up to the time at which he began to write, he makes it his one object to express the sensations of the moment. Attaching slight importance to clear-cut details, he shows that in nature there is a certain all-pervading element of *emotion* which brings about the

union, nay, the identification of the artist soul, with the scenery and life all around.

Contenting himself with exploring the inexhaustible resources of the physical world, he makes no attempt to probe into the depths of man's moral nature; in fact, his philosophy must be confessed to be distinctly subordinate to his artistry. Still, there is nothing complete about any of his books of impressions; they cannot even be said to have a conclusion at all.

His wonderful style is both supple and unaffected, for he depicts everything just as the eye sees everything. It is not the description of detail, however, that charms most, but rather the representation of the *general* impression, the laying bare, so to speak, of the very soul of a nation or a country. His word-pictures are more vivid and eloquent than the subtlest or most grandiose effects of any artist on canvas, for he succeeds in bringing into striking relief objects or scenes devoid of any pronounced outline, form, or colour. Description is scarcely the word to use when considering Loti's art; it is rather a marvellous power of *evocation* that he possesses. Not that he does violence to the language he uses, his words are those of any other writer, but he has the rare gift of endowing them with meanings

hitherto unsuspected, of arousing emotions in the soul of a reader with any claim at all to sensibility or imagination.

But, after all, the poetry of a blind nature is inevitably one of disillusionment, continually bringing us back to the idea that we are no more than mere atoms . . . specks of dust . . . in a beginningless and endless cosmos. The immensity of space and time was keenly felt by Loti, causing him to speculate upon the destiny of man and to look forward to a state of final annihilation or nothingness as the goal of his aspirations and longings. As he says in *Fleurs d'ennui*: "Un certain *nulle part*, fait d'inconscience universelle et d'anéantissement absolu, ce serait beau. Qu'il existe ou non, ce néant, éternel sommeil sans rêves, plus doux que tous les rêves, je l'aime." This state of existence for which he longs would appear to be the one held of Nirvana in the popular imagination, though far from being the true Nirvana of the enlightened Buddhist.

The reason of the great success that has attended Loti's writings lies in the fact that they faithfully interpret a condition of mind that has for some time now been prevalent in most civilized countries, though more particularly in those of the Latin race. Like many of his contemporaries, he is keenly aware of a

sense of weariness or scorn at an old outworn civilization which is tired of life and yet afraid to die, eager after sensation and yet continually bored to death.

Another element of success is seen in the fact that he has opened out wider horizons and grander perspectives to a previously cramped literature by breathing into it something of his own poetic, dream-inspired nature.

Pierre Loti is a man of ardent sympathy with pain and sorrow in every form. No one could read—in "My Last Two Hunts" of the present volume—his poignant account of the cruelty inseparable from the ruthless and unthinking slaughter of innocent beasts and birds, or the heart-rending recital of cruelty and brutality set forth in his recent work, *Turquie agonisante*, without feeling that the writer was a man of the most exquisite sensibility, the most profound understanding.

It is this outspoken and fearless expression of sympathy with oppression and suffering wherever found, even more than his unrivalled power of describing the many aspects of nature, that has won for him the love and admiration of readers throughout the world.

F. R.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A Nocturne	1
Alphonse Daudet	9
Idle Pity	14
My Senegal Relative	28
Dogs and Cats	34
An Audience of the Great Sphinx	43
Impressions of the Theatre	46
Madrid, the Early Days of the American Aggression	55
Serenades	103
Tramps	111
My Last Two Hunts	122
Farewell to the Basque Country	133
A Night of Fever	142
A Sunday in Winter	154
Easter Island	165
After reading Michelet	220

ON LIFE'S BY-WAYS

A NOCTURNE

Two o'clock in the morning. Throughout the long winter night the valleys and plains of the Pyrenees are sunk in profound quiet.

Intense darkness all around and the heavens blazing with stars. Intense darkness and a multitude of black objects, here on this tiny earth on which this tiny body of mine, for the time being, lives and moves; a pure frosty air, which for a brief space fills my breast, and seems to double my transient vitality. Above, on the blue-black curtain of space, shine myriads of effulgent sparks, eternal orbs of fire.

Two o'clock in the morning: the very heart of a winter night. Over there in the East, the Star of Bethlehem, glowing down upon the flight of the mystery-laden minutes that usher in the dawn, appears in all its dazzling whiteness.

Everywhere life is hushed in silence, wrapped in a cold, death-like slumber; even the

prowling beasts have retired to sleep in hole and cave. Outside, not a soul is visible. The shepherds and the tillers of the soil, though they rise before daybreak, will yet remain for hours, sunk in slumber beneath the roof of hamlet and cot. Alone, perhaps, on the road, some vagrant or gallant—or possibly, in these parts, a smuggler—is occasionally to be met. Along my path a quivering starry light falls in a phosphorescent stream. The road itself, dry and hard, resounds and vibrates as though the ground were hollow beneath my tread. I walk on and on without the slightest consciousness of effort, so life-giving is the night air; my limbs might be said to move of themselves, like springs wound up once for all, and needing no further attention.

I gaze upon those worlds shining out above the dark earth around. Then, by degrees, I become conscious of a feeling altogether unique: a sort of dread in the presence of these heavenly bodies, of dizziness before these infinite stretches. I was about eighteen years of age when this feeling first came over me, once as I was studying astronomy, and making calculations and observations at night-time on board ship. Ordinary people, as a rule, never think about these things at all; for the most part, they are devoid of even the faintest notion of

cosmic space, and really it is a great pity that such should be the case, for this is a line of thought that would frequently shame them into dropping all their Lilliputian plans and schemes. . . . A knowledge of periods of stellar time, and the feeling, almost of terror, caused by reflecting on them, are also very soothing, for what a mingled sense of calm and disdain enters the mind regarding the paltry events of human life, if we can say to ourselves: *Mon Dieu!* what will it all matter in twenty-five thousand years from now . . . or in two or three hundred thousand . . . when this earth of ours has for ever ceased to revolve upon its axis?

The night air, at this fresh, early hour, is almost free from odour of every kind, except in certain low-lying parts of the woods, where the mist-laden exhalations of the mossy soil still make their way up through a light and tangled covering of winter twigs and leaves. This is all; you would think you were inhaling the very essence of purity. To such an extent is this the case that you could distinguish by scent alone, all along the road, where stand the few scattered farms from which there rises in occasional whiffs a mingled odour of burning and smoke and cattle. . . .

I continue to watch the fire-dust shining out over against the blue-black expanse of the

heavens. . . . This comprises *the sum-total of what is,* that which is mostly hidden from sight by paltry clouds and the blinding light of our little sun. When one comes to reflect, why were we permitted to see this, considering that the power to understand and fathom it all was to develop within us, only after the flight of centuries, and then with terrifying results? . . . To-night, the constellations fill me with inexpressible dread — those familiar starry shapes, almost eternal to human eyes that will soon be closed in death, but which, in reality, when beheld by eyes more lasting than ours, fade away as speedily as the changing, furtive forms that momentarily appear in a flight of sparks. . . . How baffling and perplexing to reflect that those objects overhead, which symbolize calm and changelessness, are really plunging along in vertiginous motion, to know that innumerable suns, flaming, or extinct orbs, are all madly whirling along through endless space! . . .

The keen night air gives a very definite impression of the icy coldness of this vast starry void, just as the sombre-hued sky recalls the funereal darkness of space wherein myriads of suns are burning themselves out without succeeding in shedding on it the slightest degree of heat or even of light, merely covering it with a seed-plot, as it were, of little twinkling

brilliants. . . . Tiny, indeed, seem those suns, flashing out in the darkness and expending their light on the cold vastnesses of space. What a waste of fire-dust do they represent, as they wander thus in cloud-groups; lost in the all-pervading darkness, endlessly falling for billions and billions of centuries into a yawning deep, which will never cease to open out before them!

* * * * *

Steps are heard in front of me, in the intense silence of this microscopic earth; a rustle of life reaches my ears through the prevailing darkness. Two human silhouettes cross my track, they are the forms of custom-house officers, as they march past, musket on shoulder. . . . I was forgetting such mundane affairs, and the fact that I am now quite close to the Spanish frontier. . . . They are going their round, two by two, as is their wont, a safeguard against possible attacks. . . . *Mon Dieu!* what an uproar there would be if a few prohibited baubles were to pass to-night out of the hands of the French pigmies into those of the Spanish! . . . How unimportant such an event would appear, from the standpoint merely of the worlds nearest to this earth of ours, from Vega, or from Bellatrix. . . .

* * * * *

Are these whirling atoms, driven about like sand on the downs by a raging wind, eddying to and fro in the immense blackness of space, and inevitably, after unnumbered ages, destined to cool and die out,—are these really the whole store of the Fire element, all that exists of it throughout the Cosmos? . . . May all this not rather be the tiny *débris*, the lost sparks of some other store, immeasurably more inexhaustible and lying beyond the reach of our poor vision or of our most powerful telescopes, farther, millions of millions of times farther—and this store would even then be only a part of another even more enormous—and so on in an endless series of magnitudes? . . . For, after all, infinity as regards the source and origin of these flaming balls is no more unlikely than the infinity of time and space, which we are compelled to admit, though powerless to imagine! . . .

And what is more, no God who ruled only the Cosmos we perceive—even this Cosmos as glimpsed by the most profound astronomical minds—would appear sufficiently great to be the *All*. I regard it as inevitable that he, in turn, should bow down before some other God, more awful in his immensity—who again would have above himself some vastly greater power—and so on, *ad infinitum*. I should pity

that Jehovah, who is supposed to be the All, were he to endure so long in all the horror of his solitude, his imperfectibility, and his absolute free-will. . . . Just now, to satisfy my poor reason in some measure, the Gods themselves would have to be subject to never-ending progress; above one God, however mighty and terrible he be, must continually tower the mystery of another, more inconceivably creative, eternal, and inaccessible. . . .

* * * * *

And on I walk, puffed up with pride though disturbed by dreamy imaginings. Right in front stands something that resembles a pillar, a lofty alarm signal set there purposely before my eyes, to check my rebellious thoughts: the steeple of a village church, outlined in black against the starry sky, the scintillations of Antares and the phosphorescent glow of the Milky Way. Whilst all around is wrapt in profound slumber, this steeple continues its vigil—which began only a few short centuries ago, however long the time may appear to us; it stands there for the benefit of the poor villagers, and perhaps also, in some degree, for rash travellers like myself, to whom it comes as a warning. . . . Indeed, owing to the position from which I, an insignificant human being, am looking, this poor village steeple

just now seems gigantic; it hides from sight whole constellations, thousands of universes, an immense number of worlds, and seems to be addressing me somewhat in these terms:

"In realms even more mysterious do thou also recognize my relative magnitude; regard the Christian idea which I represent as a protection and a shelter to prevent thee from falling into the awful abyss. Regarded in the light of thy insignificance, that idea seems to me infinitely great; it offers a tolerably exact image of truths that cannot be known, an image that has wisely been brought within the scope of thy poor reason. Try to imitate the simple in heart and mind who lie buried in the graves beneath my feet, and who have departed this life in childlike trust, without peering into the unknown or soaring upon the wings of imagination. . . ."

ALPHONSE DAUDET

HENDAYA, *Sunday, 19th December.*

THE time has gone past for me, in my retreat on the frontier of Spain, to speak of Alphonse Daudet . . . and so I should like just to say how much I loved him, how I admired the character of the man, especially during the latter years of his life. Sorrowfully do I reflect on our first meeting, seventeen or eighteen years ago! . . . Whilst still an unknown writer, I happened to be staying a few days in Paris after the publication of one of my earlier books; and there, calling upon a mutual friend, I found a note from Daudet requesting that I should introduce myself, should opportunity offer. It was in the Luxembourg gardens one fine May day, along the lilac-sheltered avenues, that I found myself chatting with him, feeling somewhat astonished at the cordiality of his welcome. At the outset I had offered him one of my Turkish cigarettes; no sooner did the thin grey smoke begin to curl upwards

than he stood still, a distant look in his eyes as he said, "What thoughts of the Orient are evoked by the scent of this fragrant weed! . . ." We talked for an hour, and I could not recover from my surprise at finding him so genial and simple-hearted. On such a day it seemed quite natural to allude to a whole host of trifling things, one after another, as we walked side by side. . . . And I took my leave, delighted with my visit.

On subsequent occasions, when he had unfortunately lost the power to walk, he would frequently remark, "Do you remember, Loti, the first Turkish cigarettes we smoked together . . . and the lilacs of the Luxembourg? . . ."

As I am a wanderer by profession we did not meet very often. Nevertheless, just as our first chat remained unbroken throughout the intervals of silence in the Luxembourg gardens, so also, in the intervals between many a long voyage, did our friendship increase, becoming deeper and more intimate as the years went by.

I was one of those who never thought of him as about to die. On each of my visits to Paris I saw his noble face, in spite of intense suffering, scarcely changed at all. His eyes seemed to manifest a strong will to stay on earth with those he loved—and it appeared as though this will must prove triumphant.

I remember a sentence he uttered, some ten years ago, one day when suffering terribly: "Ah! yes, there have been moments when I have felt a kind of impulse to fling myself on my knees in prayer. And then I have said to myself: 'No, I cannot do it! Such a thing is impossible!' and, with a shrug of the shoulders, I have turned sadly away."

But would he have spoken in this way as the end approached? I do not think so. How gladly would I have followed the secret evolution of his soul, as it gradually ascended from those dreary, forbidding depths to thoughts of immortality, of forgiveness and eternal love almost Christian in their fervour; nothing precise or definite perhaps, but still a faith in supreme justice, in glorious, tranquil Hereafters. I really believe that his noble serenity, his forgetfulness both of himself and of his pain, his heroic, martyr-like patience, might in some measure be attributed to this faith: for though almost continually suffering, he daily grew more kind and tender, imbued with a spirit of gentle pity and indulgence; he guarded against allowing his physical sufferings ever to trouble any one, and showed himself gay and pleasant to the loving relatives and friends about him, smiling all the while and witty to the end. . . .

I merely wished to say, to these friends and relatives of his who may read these lines, that he has left a grievous void in my life, and that I loved him as one seldom loves a friend. I was anxious to retain his esteem ; when I wrote, I instinctively sought his approval, and always had him in the background of my mind. Now, a portion of the tender affection I felt for him has been transferred to those rare souls he leaves behind, into whom his own soul has partially entered.

To-day, in this quiet spot, beneath the warm though sombre and low-lying sky of a winter Sunday, it is he who is constantly appearing before me; with tender respect I dwell in memory upon all the wise and noble thoughts, the indulgent and soothing ideas to which he gave utterance during our last few talks together, on the subject of mankind and life generally. It is with a sense of grief and deep emotion that I remember those dear loving eyes of the dying man, eyes full of reproach because I shall not be able to see him on the morrow. . . . It was impossible for me to stay another day. . . .

Of a surety I shall long regret never having seen him again. Still, it is so foreign to my nature to exhibit signs of grief, — however touching and deserving of respect their object

may be,—so alien to my disposition to delight in ceremonies and processions that I feel even nearer to him in this gloomy solitude of mine than I should be in the noisy throng, following the black hearse that is about to take him from us for ever. . . .

IDLE PITY

I

An Old Horse

It is a glorious July sun in Spain. The scene is an immense arena, around which twelve thousand spectators, in breathless excitement, follow the varying fortunes of a bull-fight.

In front of me is a dazzling sight: from top to bottom of the huge amphitheatre, on which the sun's fierce rays are beating, is a sea of heads that seem to touch one another, broad-brimmed hats, *bérets* and mantillas; a waving of white kerchiefs or red paper fans, and over all this sordid mass of people, clad in tawdry garb, the splendid light and glory of a Spanish summer.

In the shade, where I happen to be, is a more select — though quite as compact — crowd, equally eager to witness the old national spectacle. Behind and above me are the boxes, in which elegant *señoras* appear: an exhibi-

tion of gorgeous though cool-looking dresses; rows of dark faces, lit up with flashing eyes—most of them quite beautiful—and everywhere the time-honoured mantilla and the lofty flower-adorned *chignon*.

The air resounds with frenzied cries; brass instruments alternating with tambourines and *musettes*; from time to time an anxious silence, a shudder and a tremor that fill the breasts of all, followed by a sudden ironical whistle or by the deafening roar of the crowd, striking on one's ears like a thunder-clap.

There is a prolonged, ear-splitting trumpet signal as the third bull enters the arena; head and horns erect, he gallops forward, proud and nimble, resembling some enormous gazelle worked up to a state of frenzy. Murmurs of approval run through the crowd, testifying to the beauty of the fighting animal. Carrying heavy riders all decked in ribbons and streamers, lean sorry-looking horses, which have been given their fill of oats, and will shortly, with pierced and bleeding flanks, be lying stretched on the gore-stained sand, are now gaily prancing round the track before they go to their doom. Finally the *toreros* appear, all glittering with gold, they gracefully advance, and spread their crimson *capas* before those terrible horns, avoiding death by little side leaps, or, more

disdainfully, by a twist of their supple loins. The bull is either astonished or amused at finding before him nothing but a mantle, continually fleeing before him, a void, never anything solid or substantial. . . . The commencement is charming; for the sport appears to be something altogether dainty and graceful; really, one would say that a perfectly innocent test of speed and elegance between men and beast was taking place, did not pools of blood, left behind from previous contests and imperfectly hidden from view by the sawdust thrown over them, still mark the scenes of death-struggles — the very spots where, but a few minutes previously, some disembowelled horse was gasping in agony. . . .

It is a poor old horse, dead tired, and probably with the strokes of a merciless lashing still visible, a wretched old one-eyed horse, which is the first to meet the onrush of the lordly animal and be hurled headlong into the dust.

Whilst his rider is heavily rising from the ground, he also regains his feet. There is a deep gash in his chest, from which the blood is streaming.

His meagre flanks quiver with pain and dread. . . . Where shall he flee for safety? . . . A moment's indecision, . . . then, with a pathetic appeal in his eye, he makes for a man standing

there, holding out his hands to take the bridle: one of those wretched creatures who, during the intervals, stuff with bran the gaping wounds made by the bull's horns, or else thrust back the quivering entrails and sew them together with thread, so that the poor beast may again appear before the crowd and repeat the performance.

No doubt the old horse feels quite reassured as he thus entrusts himself to human care, and his poor solitary eye seems to say: "True, you men have often beaten me, but you have never torn me up, you have never disembowelled me in this fashion. I am sure you don't want to kill me, do you? I am but a poor beast, and have perhaps been stubborn and lazy at times, but, after all, I have worked so hard for you with this old worn-out body of mine. . . ." And he grew quieter as the man adjusted his saddle and harness and patted him on the back, though with a somewhat bantering air. Then, when everything was ready and the rider again in the saddle, the rascally fellow, with a droll smile addressed to those near at hand, fastened a bandage over the horse's eye, so that he might rush the more surely to his doom, as he remarked: "Wait a moment, old fellow . . . you'll see what's going to happen to you. Don't be afraid. . . ."

Oh! What a joy it would be, if the police were not about, what supreme delight to crush that smile on the man's brutal face and leave traces there of another kind, with a few blows of a cudgel! . . .

Mon Dieu! What pretty *señoras* are seated behind me, leaning over the sides of the boxes! White mantillas, black mantillas, great high combs *à la Carmen*, and bouquets of yellow flowers in their dark hair. What a pity that only in these blood-stained arenas is to be seen this old-time finery, so wonderfully adapted to these delicate, pallid faces, with their languid, coal-black eyes! What a pity that Spanish ladies will not understand that this *coiffure* lends an air of distinction and mystery to the countenance! . . . One young woman, especially, in all the beauty of her twenty-five summers, clad in light blue, with tea roses in her breast, was leaning indolently over the balustrade, in a delightful attitude that set off her superb figure to perfection, almost the ideal personification of a dark pale-cheeked *señora*. . . .

The next moment, the poor horse, a bandage now over his eye, and manifesting a certain degree of confidence in spite of the nervous trembling which continued to the end, was led forward by the hand and shamelessly offered

up to the bull, which plunged its horn into the poor creature's breast.

He rolled on to the sand, almost at my feet, and close to the gate upon which I was leaning his lungs burst open, shedding blood in streams which gushed up like water from a pump. And the same wretch of a valet, with brutal eagerness, made speed to drag away and place on some other dumb martyr the poor dying animal's bridle and bit, tearing and gashing his mouth in the process. Then, as the crowd gave signs to indicate that the animal must be killed, the man went back and began to probe about in the region of the cerebellum with an old knife, the ugly grating sound of which could be heard as it encountered bone or cranium. Without a groan or a murmur the horse silently endures the death agony. A convulsive quiver of the limbs, no more; then the suffering head fell back on to the ground, and he suddenly entered into a state of final peace, unending immobility. It even seemed as though Death had suddenly imparted somewhat of his calm dignity to this pitiable wreck of mortality.

He, at all events, has finished his course! Set free from everything terrestrial, he has become *a thing* which no one can ever again ill-treat and torture.

* * * * *

Whereas I, who have not yet finished my course, and over whose eyes it is unlikely that any cruel bandage will be placed when that final moment arrives, in all its horror — I transferred my pity upon myself, and, during those few instants, felt myself to be a more wretched creature than the dead horse.

Then, remembering that only what constitutes physical beauty, the charm and delight of the eye, does not prove deceptive, I turned my gaze away from the arena and looked up at the beautiful *señora*, dressed in light blue, and wearing on her head a white mantilla and in her breast a bunch of tea roses. . . .

II

An Old Woman

Bent almost double, a poor old woman was trudging along the mountain track, in all the splendour of the summer evening. She was carrying an enormous load of fallen wood on her back.

It was a solitary spot where I met her — lonely and fair as a dreamland Eden — in Guipuscoa, right in the heart of the Spanish Pyrenees, with their glorious green forests. On

every side the proud and lonely peaks, inviolate beneath their mantle of foliage, rose into the azure heights. Down in the dale below, a stream was mirrored, reflecting naught but ivy or fern, or the fresh bright verdure of June. In that pleasant land of shade and rippling waters there was something out of the ordinary, something of regal pomp and fairy brightness in the prodigal magnificence of leaf and flower.

The poor old woman, however, staggering along beneath her burden, had no eyes for this feast of nature. I noticed that her brow was deeply scored with two distressing wrinkles, as she painfully hastened towards some wretched home or other, where no smile, no word of welcome, would greet her. She looked so honest and kind-hearted! So meek, withal, so meek and resigned to her lot! Seeing me approach, she had politely stepped to the side of the road, as though to place a more respectful distance between the vulgar creature she regarded herself as being and the distinguished passer-by whom I represented in her mind.

Mon Dieu! What could I do to help the meek old creature a little? A sudden feeling of pity came over me at the sight of those gentle, sorrow-laden eyes of hers. Still, how was I to avoid humiliating her even more? This

bundle of wood, so painfully borne on her back, represented a ridiculously small sum of money, and it would have been an easy matter for me to say to her: "Fling all that away, poor old lady, and accept these small pieces of silver instead."

But I was afraid of offending her, after all the trouble she must have had to gather these fallen branches, one by one, in the wood. Besides, the more I looked at her, the less did I feel emboldened to offer alms; her patched garments seemed to be still decent and clean; certainly she was anything but a beggar, more likely a grandmother living in some modest farm, scorned by her greedy peasant children, who were awaiting her end as a deliverance, or perhaps some obscure worker in the fields, inured to toil.

How beautiful and peaceful, a veritable Paradise, was the country around! There, for a few rare moments, one seemed to be in the very midst of some blest retreat, with the ecstasy and exuberance of life all around one, drinking in the enchantment of the season and the hour—the glorious, placid evening hour.

Close at hand, as well as in the far distance, rose tier upon tier of beech forests, exactly resembling each other, from the low-lying grass and flowers and streams up to the cloud-topped

peaks. Beneath, in the limpid river that reflected the mountain summits, were veritable islets of flowers—islets covered with large violet distaff-thistles, pink *amourettes*, and certain water-plants that blossom out into white clusters. On the roadside, immediately at my feet, spread the most exquisite soil, carpeted with those lichens and mosses that grow only in spots which have long lain undisturbed; a soil apparently as old as the world itself, and which stretched away and was lost in the mysterious vault of that forest of beeches, with their large grey branches spreading in all directions. One felt that, from the beginning of time, none but shepherds and flocks had ever trod these delicate carpets of earth; the peace of long-past ages gently breathed upon the whole of this verdant land. . . .

By a strange anomaly, however, the country people who dwell in such Edens have neither eyes to see nor brain to understand, and the old woman, with this heavy bundle of faggots on her back, looked as woe-begone in the midst of these enchanting delights as though she were making her way through the dingy streets of a city slum, with dismal-looking walls on every side.

Now the road began to ascend, steeper and steeper; the poor old faggot-picker seemed to trudge along with even more painful jerks than

before, and a weary sigh from beneath the load of dead wood reached my ears. . . . Where could she be going? And what could possibly be done to help her?

Thank Heaven, the village at last came in sight, close by, at a bend of the road—evidently her village, and the goal of her toilsome journey. Perched aloft, with a background of mountains and forests which suddenly seemed to expand, there it stood outlined against the sky, with tiny black houses and church-steeple built in the ancient Basque style; everything doubtless just as it was two or three centuries ago, the houses growing old, side by side, slowly crumbling away beneath rain and sun; all arranged, as by a master artist, to delight the eye of man.

And yet, its charm is scarcely perceptible to any but strangers, refined and fastidious passers-by; it quite escapes the notice of such as are born and die there. These spots of earth, so ideal in appearance, are the scenes of much sadness, of merely vegetating existences, though sometimes, it must be confessed, of healthy and exuberant—though brief—youth, and of premature old age, all lonely and forsaken. . . .

I had slackened my pace so as to remain near the old wood-gatherer, and was now walking along, almost by her side.

Together we entered the abandoned, forlorn-looking village, at the peaceful evening hour, just before the *Angelus* began to toll: a few small gloomy streets, two or three tiny shops in which were sold printed calicoes, harness for mules, primitive, rough-looking objects, and finally the venerable church, with its cemetery and its *jeu de paume*. And all around this collection of old-world beings the lonely silent Cantabrians and their great beech forests.

So it appeared as though there were nothing I could do for the poor old woman whom chance had made my travelling companion. She was to go to earth there in one of these dark cots, deposit her burden in a corner, and then, unwelcome most certainly and neglected by all alike, as frequently happens in the case of old peasants who have ceased regular employment, she would fling herself on to her rude couch for the night. On the morrow her aimless deadly-dull life would recommence, without hope of mitigation or sympathy of any kind, and would continue right on to the hour of final anguish. . . . Oh! the poor old woman, with such a gentle look in her eyes; and yet how she filled my heart with pity when I heard that weary sigh as we ascended the hill!

Suddenly, at the end of the silent street, a little child made his appearance, toddling along

over the black pebbles, as though he had been expecting her, and had now come to meet her. Immediately he recognized the old dame he quickened his pace and held out his hands, as he exclaimed: "*Amona!*" the Basque word for "Grandmother." He was between two and three years of age, a poorly, wretched-looking creature, though *resembling her*, with the same expression, the same kind, honest eyes. A poor little being, smilingly entering upon a life of humble, never-ceasing sorrow, similar to the one his grandmother was about to leave.

"*Amona!*" She opened wide her arms, and in a rapture of tender joy her countenance instantly became radiant with delight. What mattered the long journey, the disdain and rebuffs of the others, since she had the love of this little child? No more wrinkles now on her brow; no more weary sighs; a single smile had transfigured her countenance. And, as she had doubtless divined my feelings of pity, she turned her eyes towards me, as though to make sure that I had seen the child, and seeming to say: "Just see what a little dear he is; am I not right in being proud of him? And now, don't think any longer that I am to be pitied, with a grandson like mine. . . ."

Thereupon I resumed my journey, conscious

how unnecessary my compassion had been, when, at that moment, the church bell began to toll the *Angelus*. Hearing the sound, the old woman stood still and made the sign of the cross, whilst on her face, inclined in prayer, appeared an expression of fervent, simple-hearted faith, that true faith which falters before neither old age nor death.

Then, in the peace of that abandoned spot, which was beginning to sink into slumber in the midst of the forests beneath the summer twilight, I, an eternal wanderer who had come to stay a single evening amongst these simple, resigned beings, felt inclined to bow down in a spirit of deep humility, and say: "Pity me in thy turn, kind old peasant-woman, and pray for the repose of my soul; for, of the two of us, it is I who am the more wretched, infinitely the more deserving of pity. . . ."

MY SENEGAL RELATIVE

My most indelible impressions of Senegal were obtained during my first autumn in that land, having been summoned thither by the exigencies of a seafaring life.

I had gone there for a two years' exile, just as the summer was passing away, and at the time of the rainy season, when the marshes were still covered with a rampant growth of vegetation, swarming with insects and flies of every description. But these grasses had quickly withered up and the large-winged flies were dead; I had watched the whole of a season's life fade away beneath the dull, depressing heat of a rainless October.

From childhood I had been prepared for the strange and melancholy nature of the place by an old neighbour, who was distantly related to my family, and had long dwelt on the isle of Gorée when a young officer. In his garden, where he had a grey parrot and a summer-house, the walls of which were hung with African

weapons and amulets, he would frequently relate to me tales about Senegal: the very name, Gorée, as early as I can remember, possessed a power of evocation which neither distant travels nor the flight of time have succeeded completely in destroying.

On growing up into manhood, it was my turn to sojourn in Senegal, when October was beginning to usher in the dying year throughout the land. In the gloomy village of Dakar, I occupied a temporary abode overlooking the vivid blue roadstead where my ship lay anchored, a cottage built of planks and thatched with straw, which an old mulatto-woman let to any officer who might be staying in that part of the world.

This mulatto, with her tanned yellow face, was a native of Gorée. Her name was Marie-Félicité, and she was the unacknowledged daughter of some European who had either left that land half a century previously, or had succumbed to the climate of the colony and now lay buried beneath mounds of sand.

* * * * *

When November came, no rain had fallen for weeks, and about this dry autumn there was something abnormal, something disturbing to one who had hitherto been accustomed to the climate of France.

I was also informed that, until the fructifying storms and tempests of the following spring, not a drop of water would fall on the sands of this parched land. Besides, one had a kind of physical impression of the fact; an indefinable feeling of something distinctly arid in the atmosphere proclaimed that the very springs of heaven had dried up, that the yearly death of the plants would come about, not from cold, but from drought and thirst. . . . The leaves had all fallen to the ground; the few mimosas and the huge baobabs, visible here and there, were becoming grey-looking skeletons in the dull, colourless monotony of the desert.

One day, during the languid minutes following the noon siesta, whilst lying in the warm shade of the verandah, listening to the chirr of the locusts, the idea came to me to ask the parchment-visaged mulatto-woman, as she was noiselessly moving about, if perchance she had ever known my old neighbour, who had formerly dwelt on the isle of Gorée, her birthplace.

"Oh! . . ." she exclaimed, raising her long ape-like arms with a dramatic gesture, which at first brought a smile to my face,—"Oh! . . . Then you knew him! . . . He was my father! . . ."

Thereupon, somewhat impressed in spite of

myself, I sat up on my rush-built couch, the better to examine her countenance. . . . But I discovered nothing in her mummy-like features to remind me of my dead old relative.

Still, the thing was not impossible after all; on questioning her further and comparing dates and events, it even began to seem as though what she said might be true.

In spite of my doubts, this created a sort of additional link attaching me to the hut, to the poor yellow decrepit creature and her desolate old garden, where the sand was daily covered over with innumerable little designs and figures, constantly being effaced and renewed by the silent coming and going of lizards. . . . Either because I was afraid of causing her pain or because I needed affection of some kind—I was very lonely and very young—I did not dispute her statement, but accepted the tender and childish attentions she lavished on me from that day, even the comic title of "nephew," which at times she had the audacity to give me. I spent the whole autumn and part of the winter there, under the loving care of this poor old woman, whose face, beneath a mass of hair done up in curl-paper, became wreathed in smiles whenever I looked at her.

* * * * *

November came to an end in a uniform

monotonous light; every evening the same enormous setting sun sank like a blood-red ball below the horizon. The gigantic baobab close by, wholly stripped of foliage, resembled a dull, pink-grey madrepore; the dry burning winds had finally scattered and destroyed its leaves.

Then December, January, and February followed one another beneath the rays of the same awful, impassive sun, whose face no cloud ever veiled. It was still as hot as ever, as unchangeably beautiful, and yet nothing could live: a sinister omen.

Around the hut of Marie-Félicité the locusts carried on an uninterrupted chirping, at once feeble and shrill, a sound which grew more irritating about noon and then died away as evening advanced; from time to time, also, could be heard the droning song of a negress, whilst from the direction of the village came the dull grind of the kousskouss pestles, which never ceased pounding away. Above the garden palisades appeared an arm of the gloriously blue sea and endless stretches of yellow sands, whereon a skeleton-like baobab would from time to time raise its huge mass in solitary dignity. Everything around gave me the impression of exile and death, an impression not devoid of a certain degree of charm. . . .

And I thought once more of my old relative in my childhood days, of the stories about Senegal he used to tell me, of the amulets on his walls and the parrot in his garden. I had a kind of feeling that I was living anew his own youthful days, in times long since past and a land belonging to other periods. . . .

DOGS AND CATS

PROLOGUE

CATS are possessed of a shy, retiring nature, cajoling, haughty, and capricious, difficult to fathom. They reveal themselves only to certain favoured individuals, and are repelled by the faintest suggestion of insult or even by the most trifling deception.

They are quite as intelligent as dogs, and are devoid of the yielding obsequiousness, the ridiculous sense of importance, and the revolting coarseness of these latter animals. Cats are dainty patricians, whereas dogs, whatever their social status, retain a *parvenu's* lack of cleanliness, and are irredeemably vulgar.

A CAT

A cat is watching me. . . . He is close at hand, on the table, and thrusts forward his dimly thoughtful little head, into which some

unwonted flash of intelligence has evidently just entered. Whilst servants or visitors have been on the spot, he has scornfully kept out of the way, under an armchair, for no other person than myself is allowed to stroke his invariably immaculate coat. But no sooner does he perceive that I am alone than he comes and sits in front of me, suddenly assuming one of those expressive looks that are seen from time to time in such enigmatical, contemplative animals as belong to the same genus as himself. His yellow eyes look up at me, wide open, the pupils dilated by a mental effort to interrogate and attempt to understand: "Who are you, after all?" he asks. "Why do I trust you? Of what importance are you in the world? What are you thinking and doing here?"

In our ignorance of things, our inability to know anything, how amazing—perhaps terrifying—if we could but see into the curious depths of those eyes and fathom the *unknowable* within the little brain hidden away there! Ah! if only for a moment we could put ourselves in its place and afterwards remember, what an instantaneous and definite solution—though no doubt terrifying enough—we might obtain of the perplexing problems of life and eternity! Are these familiar animals our inferiors and far removed from us, or are they terribly near to

us ? Is the dark veil which conceals from them the cause and end of life more dense than that stretched before our own eyes ? . . . No, never will it be our privilege to solve the secret of those little wheedling heads, which allow themselves so lovingly to be held and stroked, almost crushed, in our hands. . . .

And now he is about to sleep, maybe to dream, on this table at which I am writing ; he settles down as close to me as possible, after stretching out his paw towards me two or three times, looking at me as though craving permission to leap on to my knees. And there he lies, his head daintily resting on my arm, as though to say : " Since you will not have me altogether, permit this at least, for I shall not disturb you if I remain so."

How mysterious is the *affection* of animals ! It denotes something lofty, something superior in those natures about which we know so little.

And how well I can understand Mohammed, who, in response to the chant of the *muezzin* summoning him to prayers, cut off with a pair of scissors the hem of his cloak before rising to his feet, for fear of disturbing his cat, which had settled down thereon to sleep.

Another Cat

Quite a little puss, a grey kitten three or four months old, striped like a tiger, besides being spotted, his tail ring-streaked like a panther's, belly and muzzle white, and the end of his nose quite pink. He made his appearance one morning,—Heaven alone knows where he sprang from!—a pitiable sight, lean and wretched-looking. Within a very short time he recovered, and for the past fortnight has been my most devoted companion.

To-day we have had a strong equinoctial gale, sudden and irresistible, bending the trees, dashing the sand along in maddening whirls, and lashing the sea into fury.

My grey kitten was in the garden, terrified by the deafening noise and the rush of the wind; he dashes into the house, just as a mighty gust comes through the doorway, accompanied by a quantity of fallen leaves and twigs. There is the utmost excitement throughout the house as the wind from the open sea beats upon it: the servants hasten to the badly-jointed windows to stop the sudden downpour of rain from making its way within; finally, they decide to close the shutters of those windows that overlook the sea, leaving me in semi-darkness. The little grey puss has

made up his mind to take refuge in my arms, and is now stretching himself on my knees, with a friendly purring sound, having changed into a soft, velvety thing which I might crush between my fingers if I wished.

Little velvety thing, tiny being come to birth so recently, a conglomeration of atoms which six months ago was neither formed nor even thought of, but floated about in some pre-existent state of nothingness—a nothingness more absolute and mysterious than that which follows death. . . . How strange, when one thinks of it, that he already has such genteel notions of appearance, that he is so reserved and clean—above all, that he experiences the essentially human desire of some friendly presence when the great blind, awe-inspiring forces of Destruction are let loose.

Whilst wind and sea are furiously raging outside, I stroke the dainty soft paw he has trustingly left in my hands, between which I could easily crush it. Through the velvety fur I can feel, or rather guess at, a little flesh, frail tendons, and bones: exactly what constitutes my own human limbs, so near akin to those of the feline order. Moreover, like myself, he has eyes and ears, a nose and a mouth; which statement—one, by the way, that M. de la

Palisse would have been capable of making, this I quite acknowledge—now leads me to remark how similar is the model upon which both he and I are alike fashioned, how resourceless Nature seems in varying her methods, in producing something different. Besides, this same Nature, reputed to be so inventive, so inexhaustibly diverse, must always have had recourse to this system, the only one she has thought out for the evolving of moving and thinking beings in numberless planets. . . . Then, in that dim light caused by the closed shutters and the great overhanging clouds, in the aimless roar and crash of unthinking matter around us, I suddenly become conscious that there exists between me and this little being, son and grandson of a cat, a strong link of brotherhood: both of us owing our physical life to an almost identical arrangement of the elements of which we are made up; and afterwards, both alike destined to yield up our bodies to the same dust.

Two Cats meet

A white-and-yellow cat is lying close to the edge of a house-top; he is not asleep, nor has he the slightest intention of sleeping. In obedience to the contemplative instincts of

his race, he has there taken up his post, and is engaged in idle reverie as he looks down, from time to time, on the distant surroundings.

Suddenly, at the corner of a neighbouring gable, a pair of erect ears are seen issuing from behind a chimney, then a pair of alert eyes, followed by an entire head: another cat! . . . This one is quite black; he makes his silent appearance with all the precaution of a Red Indian. He perceives the first cat from behind, and immediately stops short to reflect; then, in a series of counter-movements, very carefully planned, he steals nearer, advancing his velvety paws one after the other with ever-increasing caution.

All the same, the yellow-coated day-dreamer is conscious of the other's approach, and suddenly turns his head: ears completely drooping, the faint outline of a grimace on his lips, an imperceptible preparing of claws beneath his soft furry skin. . . .

And now the visitor starts, with back erect, though he continues to come forward, and pretends to assume once more his attitude of profound calm, whilst the first-comer, without rising, steadily keeps his green eyes fixed on him the whole time.

Evidently these two cats are slightly acquainted, and have already a certain esteem

for each other ; were it not so, a duel would be inevitable, and fur would soon be flying.

The black continues to approach with the same skilful, sidelong movements, the same prolonged pauses ; then, when he has come to within a couple of feet of his yellow friend, he sits down and looks upwards as though to say : " You see, my intentions are perfectly honourable ; I, too, wish to admire this fine landscape, that's all I have come for."

Thereupon the other turns away his eyes and fixes his gaze on the distant scene, as a sign that he understands and has lost all sense of mistrust ; seeing which, the new-comer stretches himself out in his turn, but with what slow, measured movements as he advances one silky paw after another ! . . .

A few more glances are again exchanged ; their eyes half close as though in a friendly smile, and finally, now that the pact of mutual confidence has been definitely signed, the two thinkers, paying no further attention to each other, speedily become absorbed in a blissful state of dreamy contemplation.

Epilogue

Finally, as regards the canine tribe, it cannot be denied that there are good dogs, very good

dogs ; dogs that look up at you with the most lovable eyes. Personally, I must confess that I have felt considerable esteem and affection for some of them. All the same, I share the opinion of the Orientals, who rather despise the dog as being tainted with filthy instincts, whilst they respect and fear the cat as a sort of little sphinx.

AN AUDIENCE OF THE GREAT SPHINX

ONE winter night I remember going to see the great Sphinx of Egypt, when the moon was at its full.

This was our first interview, but its face, as legend depicted it, had for many years haunted my mind—that face which is unique throughout the world, so terrifying in its calm, age-long repose. From having met it everywhere in effigy, I had almost come to regard it as non-existent, a face seen in dreamland.

That night I had driven from Cairo, after dining in an ultra-modern hotel, filled with all kinds of tourists bent on extravagance and luxury.

How unexpected the change, once I had left the noisy town, to find stretching in front of me that immense shroud: the desert of Libya! . . . A road, lined with palms, afterwards with small stunted trees, and then . . . nothing more; the land converted into a vague kind of thing, with undefined contours, a sort of

pink cloud, on which no footstep makes the faintest sound: sand, an eternal stretch of sand, dismal and sad-looking beneath the moon's pale beams.

After an hour's drive in the landau, I was conducted on foot in the direction of the Sphinx. On the sandy desert not a sound was audible.

Alongside of the great triangular silhouettes of the Pyramids, which were also pink-tinted, like the sand in the moonlight, appeared a shapeless mass, one might have called it a rock, though it offered a dim resemblance to a seated animal: there it lay, as it had done for countless ages, somewhat protected, by the thin stretch of desert, against invasion by modern man. We approached it from behind, but in this position it disappointed my expectation; it inspired no feeling of dread whatsoever, for it represented nothing at all. Only the silence of the sand was impressive; the very sound of our footsteps was here drowned as though we were treading the thick carpet of some sanctuary.

Suddenly, its face appeared, harsher and more mummified beneath the moon's cold beams; its great mysterious face, proudly poised over against the sky, and gazing upon what has been lying there for countless centuries—the wide-spreading horizon. . . .

And it smiled in disdain, that enormous face, in spite of time's ravages, which have disfigured it with the flat nose of a death's head. I sat down in front of it, as the moon traced on the sand my blue shadow; and, looking up, I shamelessly fixed upon its eyes my own: the gaze of an ephemeral pigmy. Then there came over me the feeling that it, also, was looking at me; and, by degrees, a terrible fascination stole from it, and I sat there, hypnotized by that unflinching glance, as silent and motionless as though I were dead.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE THEATRE

AFTER the first performance at the Opéra-Comique of the *Mariage de Loti*, music by Reynaldo Hahn.

March 1898.

To Her Majesty Queen Nathalie of Servia.

Seated in a box overlooking the stage, in that dim light so familiar to all, I wait for the curtain to rise on a scene which even now fills me with a vague sense of uneasiness. I am about to see something which will be, as it were, the materialization of one of my dreams—or rather a kind of perverted interpretation, by other minds, of a memory that is still painful tome . . . . *Mon Dieu!* Why did I allow it to be played? Most assuredly, when I gave this permission several years ago, I did so without reflecting that sometime this "first performance" would inevitably take place.

They have begun. . . . The orchestra attacks the prelude, thus bringing to an end the

murmur and conversation of the spectators. The stringed instruments discourse sweet, curious strains, music from *another sphere*, one might call it, reminiscent of the dim and distant past. . . .

And now the curtain rises, the usual commonplace red curtain, and immediately the charm which seemed to be stealing over me dissipates and fades away. Still, the scenery is beautiful; one might even say that nothing finer could be afforded by the scanty resources of a theatre : a little canvas and paint, with lamps to represent the sun and the moon. I smile as I look at the women of Tahiti, who at first remind me of an improvised masquerade. Assuredly there is a certain resemblance, but there is also something lacking, a something altogether essential.

Here comes the young lady who represents Rarahu, with pallid face and a bluish circle round her eyes ; she trails her light dress along, and wears in her hair a red *hibiscus*, just above the ear, in Tahitian fashion. . . . At once I take her seriously ; what a consummate artist this girl, still in her teens, must be, to give herself so indescribably exotic a character, and assume such an aspect of mingled languor and mystery ! . . . All the while the music of the orchestra continues its witching effect, gradu-

ally and ever increasingly transforming the painted canvases into visions of dream-land. . . .

Enter Princess Oréna and a few ladies of the Court, accompanied by naval officers in uniform. Thereupon I start up with a feeling of impatience and annoyance: this is more than I had expected. Given my military ideas—ridiculous and old-fashioned, if you will—the sight comes over me with a shock, and fills me with rebellious feelings. Besides, the exquisitely soothing effect of the music has driven from my mind the fact that, only this morning, I have ceased to belong to the Navy I love so well;[1] no sooner do these uniforms appear than I suddenly remember, and it is indescribably painful to see the white gold-laced coats, which remind me of the time when I served in the colonies or in the old quiet barracks of the seaport where I was quartered, during hot summer days in France; the whole past of a sunny youth is brought back to memory by the sight of these white uniforms, a past that is gone for ever, irrevocably dead. . . . And I withdraw as far back as I can into a dark

[1] This took place on the very day that the author had been illegally struck off the naval lists, along with about thirty other officers, by a former ministry. Since then the Conseil d'Etat has restored M. Pierre Loti and his companions to their corps, as is known to all.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

corner, behind the queen, who has done me the honour to invite me to her box, and who divines and sympathizes with the sudden feeling of anguish that has come over me. . . .

The light has now almost disappeared, and the magic of the music calls into being that far-off mystery which continues to fill a canvas intended to represent a Polynesian forest. Princess Orĕna's attendants have left the stage. The maidens of Tahiti, almost concealed from view by the dim light, surround a naval cadet, *who, I am vaguely aware, is becoming myself*—myself more than a score of years ago. It is the "baptism scene," and the music is full of such languishing charm that I actually hear the voice of the girl, who wears the *hibiscus* in her hair, utter my name for the first time, without feeling moved in the slightest. . . . Then I close my eyes and mentally rehearse—oh! with what inexpressible sadness!—the real scene of that distant baptism, far away in the depths of space . . . , far away also in the mists of time. It all returns to me as from some irrevocable past: the forms and faces, the balmy air, the frenzied wonder and delight of early youth, amidst the orange trees at midnight, with the Southern stars twinkling and flashing overhead. . . .

On opening my eyes I have to wait a few

moments to allow the music to exercise its charm, and bring myself once again under the illusion of all this artificiality. The first thing I see is a general movement on the part of the maidens of Tahiti; they are leaving the stage, and, in the faint deceptive light of the lamps, their flowing robes and wreaths of flowers gradually disappear. I cannot see their faces, to which it has been found impossible to give a Maori expression, though now they are beginning to produce on me the requisite sense of illusion. Listening to the enchanting music, my recollection of Polynesia becomes even more vivid, filling me with a thrill of emotion from time to time. . . .

The cadet who has just been baptized Loti, and the pale-faced girl wearing the *hibiscus*, are now alone in the forest, at nightfall, in a rapture of ecstasy. And the two young voices blend in a love duet, which no longer fills me with distress, for its strains and cadences are delightful to listen to. . . .

* * * * *

The second act brings with it no thrill of emotion; the scenery is very fine, but not sufficiently true to nature to please me. *It is not true to life.* During this act, every time my name is uttered, it either makes me smile or exasperates me to such a degree that the blood

rushes into my face. *Mon Dieu!* Why did I not think of requesting my kind friends, the writers of the libretto, to change my name for some other? They would certainly have consented to do so.

When it is all over, feeling that I have again nothing in common with the play, and am only conscious of a sort of painful stupor from what I have seen of the first act, as well as from the unexpected events that have just wrought a change in my life, I go behind the scenes and congratulate, in more or less perfunctory fashion, and assuredly less heartily than they deserve, the artists who have sung so well. The truth is that, for the moment, they no longer represent the characters so vivid in my memory, nor is it even I myself at all who am now speaking to them.

* * * * *

The third act begins, and the whole theatre is again quiet and attentive.

During the introductory bars of the prelude, and before the curtain rises, a Tahitian chorus is heard, a genuine song this time, at once childlike and barbaric, imported from that distant isle, and giving a real impression of life in far-away Oceania. . . . I had not foreseen the effect this song would have, on the evening of such a day as I had gone through, and, in

this artificial theatrical atmosphere, I feel a wave of intense sadness come over me.

The curtain—still the same commonplace red curtain—rises at last. It is night; and the moon is shedding her beams over palm-dotted gardens; in the centre of the stage is the verandah of a Tahitian palace, over which Chinese lanterns cast a pink glow. Quite charming, but once again *it is not true to life*, and my first glance dispels the secret emotions which were on the point of stealing over me.

Meanwhile, groups of maidens come and go beneath that open verandah, between the rude wooden colonnades: Tahitian girls in festive garb, more true to life than those in the first act. Reeds and flowers fantastically adorn their hair. Especially life-like are the naval officers in full uniform, with embroidered coats and epaulettes. . . . Finally, I am compelled to crave permission of the queen to withdraw for a moment, for I dread that my feelings may overcome me, I am ashamed of the tears that spring to my eyes. . . . Indeed, it is as though some deliberate and ironical fate had brought me to this performance, to witness this attempt at reconstructing my early life in the Navy, on the very day that I have had to quit my epaulettes . . . never to wear them again. . . .

* * * * *

I regain self-possession and return to my seat. The play draws to a close; the joyous groups of officers and maidens have left the verandah.

Princess Oréna now appears beneath the colonnade of her palace, to which she returns alone; exotic and charming to behold, with her wreath of gorgeous lilies and roses! Slowly she is about to go down into the moonlit gardens. Reaching the steps, she halts and utters the word, "Loti!"

This time, her call thrills me as though addressed directly to myself after all these years. But it no longer shocks or astonishes me, so *far away* has the inexplicable spell of the music transported me, making me forget all the world's conventions and proprieties.

Another than myself responds to this call; another who is wearing theatrical epaulettes in that unreal garden, beneath the gleam of an artificial moon: a kind of phantom of myself, and whom I find it impossible to tolerate, in spite of his good acting and well-trained voice. The feeling of ridicule that comes over me in presence of all this artificiality, though they have succeeded in making it very seductive, has kept me, from the beginning of the play, in a state of indecision between profound sadness and a desire to smile.

From this moment, however, on to the end of the singing, it is the former feeling . . . of sadness, almost of poignant anguish, . . . that has gained the upper hand.

"Ne plus jamais vous voir, enchantement des nuits
De Polynésie. . . "

murmurs the actor who has assumed my name, and is about to leave for ever that delightful isle, as I left it long ago. . . . In the circumstances through which I am passing, how moving to listen to these words, whose meaning is so mysteriously intensified by the music! . . .

"O pays de Bora-Bora,
Grand morne bercé par le flot sonore,"

sings in dying accents the young maiden in whom Rarahu has momentarily awakened to life. . . .

To bring the play to a conclusion, the Tahitian chorus, the childlike, barbaric song that but a short time ago had sent a thrill of sadness through me, is again heard in a grand farewell, behind the moonlit trees. Its dull reverberations fill every part of the theatre; the orchestral harmonies give it an inexpressible depth of meaning, and all the time the curtain is falling, it continues, dying away by imperceptible stages, pitilessly recalling to memory the delights and sorrows of the past. . . .

MADRID, THE EARLY DAYS OF THE AMERICAN AGGRESSION

I

Impressions on Arrival

Wednesday, 27th April 1898.

About noon I leave my cottage at Hendaya, in a small rustic-looking vehicle, to proceed to Irun, the first Spanish station, along the field road to Béhobie.

This road, leading through a country that breathes of April odours, is now deserted. The fresh verdure is peacefully glistening in the glorious spring sun, and the scent of hawthorn fills the balmy air. Here and there, on the green slopes in the distance, may be seen tillers of the soil; all is quiet and pleasant, as though war did not exist.

Profound calm and silence has fallen upon the Basque country; no one is visible on the Spanish frontier except two friendly carabiniers, who move apart as they salute.

Surrounded by this spring radiance and the seemingly all-pervading peace, I now cross—not without mingled emotion—this frontier, which, however, I have done so frequently at every hour of day or night, in my walks to and fro during the seven years I have been living here. . . . The fact is, I have just become aware of my affection for Spain, now that she is threatened with a great danger—one, moreover, that might in turn speedily threaten our own land of France. Besides, in spite of this apparently simple excursion, and the fact that I have no luggage with me, I am really going as far as Madrid; impelled by a somewhat unreasoning impulse, a sympathy which feels the need of manifesting itself, but possibly, deep within my heart—in spite of the difficulties, nay, the impossibilities which my reason points out to me, the more I think of them—I still retain a vague hope that I may be privileged to do something on behalf of this country. . . .

I have gone round by Béhobie instead of simply taking the railway, which would have brought me to Irun in five minutes, because there appears to have been spread a report that I was going to Madrid with a request that a privateer be placed under my command. Yesterday I was visited by a few brave fellows,

who had sailed with me in bygone days, and had come to ask me to include them in my crew, whilst, that same evening, groups of young Spaniards were awaiting me at the station of Irun, through which I was to pass, desirous of thanking me for thus offering my life in defence of their country. Consequently, to avoid the risk of receiving thanks to which I have no claim, I have chosen to go round by the fields. . . .

The command of a privateer! . . . Alas! How much I regret that such is not the case, and is, in fact, quite out of the question! . . .

Really, one would say that there is a strain of sadness abroad to-day, mingling with the tepid perfume of fresh-springing herbs—a strain of mingled gloom, anxiety, and expectation. Silence and solitude all around, with the mid-day sun shining down upon us along the river's bank, and right into the streets of the small town of Irun, through which we gallop, our horses' hoofs making a terrible clatter on the resounding stones.

There is nó one I know at the station from which I am to take the express for Madrid, with the exception of my friend, the Spanish naval lieutenant in command of the *Bidassoa*, who has come to bid me good-bye.

Once in the carriage, I engage in conversation

with an officer of the royal navy, whom chance has given me as a travelling companion. He waxes indignant at the news in the day's papers: on the one hand, Italy, it appears, anxious to remain neutral, refuses to give up the cruiser *Garibaldi*, which Spain has just bought; on the other hand, England, interpreting differently the voice of her conscience, sends to America all the ships this latter country has ordered, and even goes so far as to allow her fleet to escort them to their destination.

Six o'clock in the afternoon. "Miranda, thirty minutes' stop!" Miranda is where express passengers halt for dinner. The rain is now falling from a cold, forbidding sky. As I absent-mindedly take my seat at a small table, the waiter comes up to me with outstretched hands and an expression of joy, and says, "Excuse me, commander!" (He is an old sailor of mine who has settled in the district.) "I saw it in the papers yesterday, and I have been expecting you ever since. . . . It appears. . . . You know, I *do* wish I could go with you. . . ."

Again the fairy-tale about the privateer. . . . He, too, would like to join. . . . Of a certainty, I should have had little difficulty in collecting a crew.

A fairy-tale indeed for me and a mad dream, I greatly fear, for those who are so keen on this

adventure; in these days of electricity and rush, we should have had to find a privateer capable of attaining twenty knots an hour at least, a sheer impossibility!

* * * * *

Thursday, 28th April.

Half-past five in the morning. After a night of that dull, heavy slumber inseparable from the mingled roaring and rocking of the express train, I am aroused by a voice calling through the door, "The Escorial!"

This sombre, forbidding word striking upon my ear at such a moment, before I am yet wide awake, suddenly reminds me of Spain—the powerful magnificent Spain of former days.

At that moment, the sun's first ray finds entrance into my sleeping-car, a tiny ray, which seems quite *domesticated*, and has entered discreetly and just at the right moment through the half-open blind; but which, in reality, journeying through endless space, pays as little heed to our wars and disasters as it does to this blue curtain, and in the flight of ages, when our Latin races are extinct, will just as surely reappear with like precision and calm, to shine upon these gloomy and devastated lands of ours. . . .

About a two hours' run from the Escorial

to Madrid. The rising sun shows the land stretching out before us, bare and desolate, with thousands of huge brown stones rising in fields and copses—a very nation of cromlechs. Then everything gradually settles down and becomes commonplace, and the outskirts of the city, which are somewhat imposing on this side, begin to appear.

Madrid, at seven in the morning. Proceeding from the station to the French Embassy, where I have been offered hospitality, I find the city presenting its usual aspect in the gay morning light; the ordinary people are going to their work, gangs of street-sweepers are busy, and gardeners are watering the public gardens in the squares. Moreover, even if the situation were very serious, I am certain that Madrid would not look different on that account, and when the fashionable promenade hour arrives, in the evening, I shall be astonished if the "Castillana" is not crowded as usual with gay dresses and fine carriages, for it is one of the outer forms of Spanish pride and dignity to retain, under all circumstances, an aspect of indifference and of holiday-making.

Near the "Puerta del Sol" an interminable line of cavalry causes us to slacken speed: fine-looking troopers who ride along in perfect order, smiling and gallant. . . .

MADRID

Three o'clock in the afternoon. As evening approaches, the streets of Madrid become more lively than ever, filled with a noisy and vivacious crowd.

All about the approaches of the palace the broad avenues are dotted with cavalry officers and soldiers, wearing delightfully elegant uniforms; these are the blue and the red hussars.

In front of the old historic castle the white hussars are keeping guard. On the stairs and in the passages, halberdiers come and go, striking their weapons on carpets, steps, or resounding flags whenever some prince or high official passes by. Crossing the inner galleries, her presence indicated by the respectful clash of halberds, comes a noble lady, white-haired and beautiful to behold, as she approaches with queenly gait: Her Imperial Highness, the Archduchess Isabelle, mother of the Queen Regent.

The front of this palace looks upon a kind of circular grove, dotted with antique statues which appear to have taken up their position, all around these trees, for the dancing of some old-fashioned and solemn round.

On the opposite side the royal windows overlook the country—a sight that fills one with wonder, for, though so near the city, the land

beyond presents every appearance of a desert: no enclosures or dwellings visible, nothing but woods and undergrowth, a vast, wide-looking expanse through which winds the gloomy Manzanares, whilst distant mountains form its horizon.

This far-away view, of which glimpses are to be caught from between these brocaded curtains whose shades have been toned down by time, gives an impression of even greater sadness and grandeur to the lonely sumptuous rooms. A glorious and magnificent past seems slumbering in these dead salons, which endlessly succeed one another; so different, however, are they from each other, the artists of the past having given their individual fancy full play, that as you pass along you experience surprise after surprise. The wide frames of the doors are all made of agate or rare marble, the strangely veined colours of which blend with the pale brocade on the walls.

There is the Charles III. salon, painted a sober blue, all dotted with silver stars. Other salons, with hangings of exquisite old satin, are of a pale pink, with innocently roguish Louis XV. effects, or of inimitable gold-embroidered antique red, with rich Renaissance ornaments, or else of a sea-green curiously blended with sulphur yellow, or again of a

royal blue embroidered with brilliant yellow; the furniture stately in its magnificence, and dating back to the Empire. One large hall, the ceiling of which wholly consists of earthenware flowers and foliage, possesses mural hangings of pearl-grey satin, embroidered and re-embroidered from top to bottom with white or pink wreaths, which must have required the lifelong patient toil of an army of workwomen. You feel that all these precious things have remained there, respected by human revolutions, year after year and century after century; the very phantoms of the sovereigns, who lie buried in the Escorial, would still find intact, and but slightly discoloured, the splendid ornaments with which they were acquainted in their lifetime.

The Throne room, the largest and most superb of them all, adorned throughout with crimson, gold-embroidered old velvet, has its walls flanked with large black statues holding golden emblems in their hands, and standing out in quaint poses over against the brilliant red background. Four bronze lions guard the steps of this Spanish throne, on which the Queen and her Imperial mother—whom it now seems as though Europe were bent upon leaving to their fate, in presence of this unforeseen peril, these revolting aggressions—on solemn

occasions take their seat in all the pomp and state of bygone days. . . .

This evening the approaches of the palace are comparatively silent and quiet. Everywhere else in Madrid, however, great crowds are to be seen, invading the streets and promenades like a flowing tide at the approach of night. One divines the prevailing excitement, and even anxiety, by the attitude of certain groups stationed in front of the various places where telegrams are delivered. The whole nation, however, are determined and full of confidence in their claims, their courage is of a light-hearted and joyous type; it is the old Latin gaiety—common to Spaniards and French alike—and masks a bravely restrained uneasiness. Music is to be heard on every side: guitars, songs, and laughter. And the noise, which might be taken for that of some national festival, continues to increase as night approaches.

II

A Visit to the Queen

MADRID, *Saturday, 30th April.*

Madrid was more gay and animated than ever this evening; the tide of human beings, eager for news and excited by the rumours of war, thronged the streets—and the lower classes,

more especially, introduced a distinctively Spanish element into these noisy crowds: the clean-shaven men with their broad-brimmed felt *sombreros*; the women in shawls, their hair adorned with ribbons of the national colours; this being the fashion here ever since the beginning of the American aggression.

And when the fashionable world appears as usual, the long avenues, interspersed with shady lawns, and resembling the Champs-Élysées in Paris, are thronged with carriages and human beings. In the shady freshness of the spring foliage the large Judas trees, in full bloom, covered the ground in violet clusters; beneath the clear sky and the warm breeze everything appeared to assume an aspect of joy and gladness. A never-ending stream of carriages, drawn along by teams of mules ornamented with red tufts, and of aristocratic-looking equipages with coats of arms and gold-laced lackeys, rolled past. And the beautiful *señoras*, reclining in open landaus, waved their pretty little salutes—so distinctive of Madrid—to the cavalry officers as they rode by. . . . Really, when you see how eagerly all these people are now offering their fortune and their lives, you cannot but admire their spirit of haughty gaiety, their smiles of disdain.

* * * * *

I now wish to speak of Her Majesty, the Queen Regent of Spain, to try to instil somewhat of my religious veneration for her into the minds of those unknown friends who are wont to read my works. But . . . at the very outset I feel brought to a standstill by an unforeseen dread, impossible to define : I dare not write down the words that come to me, they seem altogether lacking in due respect and discretion. Still, I should like to say something—though, no doubt, I shall confine myself to a few trivial or adventitious remarks, scarcely giving any hint of all I found deserving of admiration in her character, both as queen and as mother. . . .

At nightfall, then, I made my way to the palace, having been informed earlier in the day that Her Majesty would graciously receive me. It was not without a certain feeling of anxiety that I proceeded to this audience, at such a time of national trouble.

On entering, a twilight gloom had already fallen upon the great historic stairs, the only sign of life being the incessant comings and goings of the halberdiers. As I had arrived before the appointed hour, I waited in the great halls, reminiscent of the splendour of their past glory.

Six years previously I had had the honour of being presented to Her Majesty, though I had

never seen her in this sumptuous palace. How painfully solemn are the present circumstances!

Whilst waiting in the sombre rooms overlooking the deserted country, my thoughts fly back to that gay and bright palace in San Sebastian, to which I was in the habit of going every year in either July or September. Once more I behold the simple white salons, filled with flowers, the wide glass doors opening out upon that magnificent Bay of Biscay, with its ever-swelling waves and sky invariably black with summer storms. . . . Simple in her dress, though truly regal in appearance, notwithstanding this studied simplicity, the Queen here received her numerous visitors with never-failing kindliness. Speaking French so well that not the faintest shade of meaning escaped her, appreciating our literature and art, and interested in them, whilst all the time giving proof of her superior judgment and artistic nature, Her Majesty would question me on every conceivable subject: at one time on the evolution of French literature, at another on my travels, the secrets of the Orient, Arabia, or the fakirs of India. Occasionally, with an indulgent smile, she would even correct my answers; whereupon a sense of mingled charm and wonder would steal over me at her vast stores of knowledge.

As royal audiences can never last long, the Queen rapidly passed from one subject to another; our talks seemed merely to touch the fringe of human affairs.

The motherly side of the Queen would suddenly show itself from time to time, and then she spoke of her son in terms of tender affection.

The young King sometimes entered the large bright salon; it was here that I first saw him when quite a child, playing with his toys. Year after year I watched him grow, the thoughtful look in his bright eyes becoming more pronounced as time went by.

Last October, being invited to call on the Queen before the departure of the Court for Madrid, no sooner had I entered than Her Majesty arrived from her drive: "I have just been," she said, "to watch my soldiers leave for Cuba. . . . Alas! some of them were so young! . . ." And I saw a look of anguish spread over her face at the thought of those youths of eighteen who were to give up their lives for the honour of Spain. No doubt the Queen was thinking of the royal child whom she had been rearing for nearly eleven years, preparing him, with admirable self-denial, for graver dangers than war or fever in Cuba; all true mothers are alike when

the objects of their affection happen to be in danger.

I have been waiting a quarter of an hour . . . twenty minutes. From the recess of a window—a recess several feet thick, and giving one the impression that this old palace is as solid and enduring as a fortress—I watch the shades of evening fall on the deserted, wild-looking country round Madrid; it is wonderfully charming, considering the magnificence of the place in which I now find myself. Turning away from the window, I see the gold shine more dimly in these rooms, which, no doubt, are haunted by majestic ghosts as soon as the blackness of night falls on the land. . . .

* * * * *

At last the door leading to the Queen's private rooms opens, at the end of another immense hall with blue brocade hangings, and my name is announced. I enter a comparatively small and private salon, very pleasant, and filled with flowers. The light of the lamps suddenly frees me from the oppressing feeling that had been stealing over me in the twilight. Here I find Her Majesty, though not dressed in the simple San Sebastian fashion, and I am at once struck by her look of profound distress, rendered even more pronounced, if possible,

by her semi-state silver-spangled robes and the flowers at her breast.

It is a mere commonplace to say that a smile *lights up* the face, but this expression is the only possible one when talking of the Queen's smile, so full is it of gentle condescension and intelligent kindliness, a sudden radiance of the rarest charm.

With such a smile on her countenance, Her Majesty deigns to receive me and thank me for coming. These too cordial thanks, however, make me somewhat uneasy, as also does the reception the people of Madrid are good enough to give me, for I am keenly conscious that I do not deserve anything of the kind, since, alas! I have no means of proving my devotion to a cause so dear to me. Being a foreigner, and therefore restrained by the laws of neutrality, I have not even the right to offer my life, as the humblest soldier of Spain can do. Of a sudden, a sense of confusion fills me for having come at all, for having requested an audience at such a time, and for the steps I have taken, in obedience to what was evidently too thoughtless an impulse, since it could have no possible result.

In self-excuse, I can only repeat to the Queen what all my friends told me when I left France, —and what, to my mind, no Frenchman would

repudiate,—namely, their entire sympathy with Spain and their feelings of indignation at seeing her thus attacked and abandoned.

"I knew it," remarked Her Majesty, "and I am profoundly moved and gratified thereby!"

In spite of the sadness of the Queen's face, which shows itself in her voice, I cannot but admire her serenity and confidence in the heroism of her people, as well as in the righteousness of their cause.

Occasionally a flash of indignation appears in her eyes. "Such calumnies have been hurled against us!" she says, alluding to various matters which were reputed to have taken place in Cuba, and more especially to the explosion of the Maine, regarding which the most childish and stupid accusations have been made against the Spaniards.

Just on the point of dismissing me, Her Majesty alters her mind, for she is gracious enough to afford me the privilege of seeing the King. With that charming simplicity peculiar to herself, she says:

"Wait a moment; you shall see my children."

Almost immediately the door opens, and the young King, wearing a sailor's suit and a blue collar, smilingly enters, followed by the two Infantes, his elder sisters—now almost

young ladies—dressed in white. He appears to me much taller and handsomer, with a healthy-looking complexion and keen, intelligent eyes: his whole person expressing dignity and grace. . . .

"You may repeat to your friends," said Her Majesty, as she dismissed me, "how grateful I am for the sympathy of France. Moreover, as you know, it is to your country that I wished to entrust our natives for protection, after the withdrawal of our ambassador and consuls; thus proving that I relied upon your sympathy all the time. . . ."

* * * * *

In another part of the palace, after traversing long stone galleries where halberdiers pace to and fro in the shadows, is a salon, hung with priceless old tapestry and fragrant with the odour of daffodils. Here, this same evening, I am privileged to offer my respectful homage to H.I.H. the Archduchess Elisabeth of Austria, mother of Her Majesty, the Queen Regent.

Charmingly dignified and beautiful, with grey hair and dressed all in black, Her Highness, I find, also understands French as well as a Parisienne, and speaks with friendly appreciation of our country, our literature, and art.

Her first question reveals the tender, anxious mother spirit:

"Do you not think the Queen is very pale; has she not greatly changed? . . ."

* * * * *

On leaving the gloomy-looking palace, the streets are so full of people that my carriage cannot proceed at more than a walking pace. The electric light glistens on façade and window, uniform and dress. As I make my way through this mass of people, so artistic and hospitable, kind and courageous, I once more feel profound regret at my inability, even in the present terrible circumstances, to show my sympathy in person, prevented as I am by the intervening frontier.

III

The First Disaster

Sunday, 1st May 1898.

Between three and four in the afternoon, accompanied by the ambassador of France and the Marquis de Zarco, I cross Madrid in an open landau—going in the opposite direction to the throng of carriages and people, all hastening towards the Plaza de Toros.

No news of the war has yet been received; consequently, everybody is waiting in hopeful expectancy. Beneath the splendour of this glorious May day the spirits of the populace

rise high, for they are filled with a joy which is a curious blend of courage, bravado, and indifference.

To-morrow, however, is the real May day, the *Dos de Mayo*, the festival in commemoration of the national deliverance; and so Madrid is already decking herself out, covering her balconies with loud-coloured draperies. And what a show at every window and balcony! To-day they are all adorned with red and yellow baldachins, made of cotton or brocade, and in the Spanish colours. The carriages of the people, too, are bright and gorgeous; the mules which, in companies of four and six, draw them along the streets have both head and crupper covered with pompons. From the country and outlying districts they have come in crowds; the trams are filled with men wearing short vests and wide girdles, dark-complexioned women with their hair dressed in the most coquettish fashion, the curls tied up in *crêpe de Chine*, and embroidered in glowing colours. We are carried along at a good pace right through this singing and laughing populace.

Soon a more lonely part is reached, where stands the large palace on the heights overlooking the Manzanares — and here Madrid abruptly terminates; immediately afterwards

begins a dismal and deserted stretch of country, at the very foot of this royal abode.

The palace, though built at the same time as our own dark-grey Louvre, is quite white; its venerable antiquity, however, becomes apparent as one approaches.

Descending a steep flight of stairs, we cross the bridge over the Manzanares, and find ourselves almost immediately in a forest or wild moor, meeting no human soul except an occasional shepherd or goatherd. The place is kept very quiet; it is a royal preserve surrounded by an old wall several leagues in length, and representative of the gorgeous imagination and splendid fancy of former sovereigns.

With the exception of the roads, which have been kept up for the purpose of State hunting, they have had the rare good taste to refrain from *arranging things* in this walled-in solitude. The trees, stunted and scanty as in all barren regions, are grouped together anyhow: on the hills grow cork-trees with their sombre-looking verdure; in the lower parts are umbrella pines, some of them being venerable giants. The sandy gravelly soil is carpeted with lichens, mosses, or fine grasses; the ground in the distance assumes the most exquisite colours, with the violet wild-thyme in full bloom, whilst the great bare horizons would seem

to have remained unchanged from time immemorial. . . .

* * * * *

Now and again, on scaling some height, Madrid appears in our rear; it is strange to look down upon that mighty capital lying at our feet, whilst all the time it is the easiest thing in the world to imagine oneself far away from the busy haunts of men; it makes one think of an Oriental city, surrounded by the peaceful desert, and unpolluted by the grimy suburbs of Western cities. Seen from this side, Madrid consists wholly of straight rows of palaces and barracks, running parallel to each other on the farther bank of the Manzanares; beyond these are the outlines of numerous churches: nothing but white or grey domes, without a single steeple. The same ashy-grey tint, blended with a little brick-coloured pink, is diffused over the majestic-looking city, from which no sound reaches us in these pastoral solitudes.

* * * * *

We dismount on a broom-covered hill. The Marquis de Zarco, who has for years been acquainted with the district, points out, in the distance, the old winding fortifications—somewhat similar to the great wall of China, though not so thick—then the hunting-seat, in the

middle of a forest stocked with deer and wild boars, where Alphonse XII. delighted to spend his leisure time ; and finally, at the foot of the snow-clad mountains which form the horizon, the vague uncertain outline of the Escorial.

To this hunting-seat in the middle of the forest, the young King, Alphonse XIII., daily comes for luncheon, breathing in the dry, healthy, pine-laden air as he drives along. But he is soon brought back to the palace for his classes and lessons; poor little princes whose destiny it is to occupy a throne always have a harder and a stricter life than other children.

Here, too, Alphonse XII. ended his days. A booted and spurred exquisite to the very last, he came here to die in unobtrusive loneliness. One morning he had asked to be left alone to repose on his bed for a few moments, requesting also that the curtains of his alcove be closed ; all around, in the same room, the Queen and a few courtiers silently waited until he should awake ; but as the silence continued they anxiously decided to draw near the bed, and there, looking as though he were peacefully sleeping, the King lay dead. . . .

"What a charming companion he was ! . . ." remarked the Marquis de Zarco, who seemed

to have retained a special affection for the King. Thereupon he related to us various episodes of that life which was so early cut short by death.

Alphonse XII., on his accession to the throne, journeying in the south of Spain, one day arrived on horseback before the walls of a large town in Andalusia. The *alcalde*, followed by the entire population, had come out to meet him, and present to the sovereign the keys of the ramparts. Suddenly, losing his head, he stammered, "Señor! . . . Señor! . . . Señor! . . ." and was utterly incapable of continuing his speech.

"Evidently," replied the King at length, with a most indulgent smile, "you are somewhat of a novice as an orator; but you must remember that I as a monarch am equally a novice with yourself."

Thereupon he took the proffered keys, flourished them in the air with a graceful gesture, and, showing himself anything but a novice, in spite of his modesty, uttered a few friendly words, which filled the people with enthusiasm. . . .

We return as the sun is beginning to go down, and, this time, on leaving the spot, we find people proceeding along the avenues near the city; many of them are women in mourning,

the widows of soldiers killed in Cuba, to whom, it appears, His Majesty has accorded permanent right of entrance; families belonging to the poorer classes, who, moreover, readily obtain permission to walk along these avenues, for Spain is a democratic country in the best sense of the word. In the streets this may be proved by listening to the talk of the people, and in the houses by noticing the friendly relations between masters and servants. More specially in this Court, where the proud ceremonial of former times has been retained by every tradition of art and chivalrous deference, may be discerned this sense of brotherhood, far more sincere and manifest than in certain *parvenus* of a republican régime. On occasion, it is possible to be most delightfully simple, and, on state days, when King and Queen are seated on their thrones, such subjects as merely wear a Spanish decoration are permitted, without card or invitation, to form in line and salute the sovereigns in the large hall, with its antique hangings of velvet and gold.

* * * * *

On our return to Madrid the sun has set; the usual evening crowd fills the streets; they seem more silent than is their wont, and are collected in smaller groups. We are surprised to see that

men are engaged in removing the bunting and flags attached this morning to the balconies.

Beyond the "Puerta del Sol" and in the vicinity of the telegraph office, where the latest despatches may be read, the street traffic is impeded by a motionless and compact mass of people. On white sheets of paper, affixed to the walls, has been hastily written in large characters an incomplete account of the first disaster—the defeat of the Spanish fleet off Manila. . . .

These white pages, clumsily scribbled over in ink, are the first signal of serious alarm, as it were. . . . On this beautiful clear May evening one would say that an evil fate is hanging over the people, now wrapped in silence, and also over the city, still gay with flags. . . .

Then there came to my mind a painting I had admired that very morning at the German Embassy. It represented a group of warrior women, wearing the winged helmets of the Walküre, and symbolizing the nations of Europe. They were on a lofty peak, and amongst them was France: all sisters, inspired by the same purpose of defence and struggle. A Genius, with outspread wings, was pointing to a dreadful, awe-inspiring sign away in the Eastern sky; on a dark approaching cloud overhead sat the God of the yellow races on a five-clawed dragon, in hieratic posture, eternal and immutable.

"That," said the ambassador, "is a conception of the Emperor William."

A sort of apocalyptic awe seemed to breathe from the picture, and, however much he may be our enemy, the Emperor who conceived such a subject is none the less a great artist, a marvellous dreamer. But the allegory would perhaps have been truer, of more immediate application, if the winged Genius had pointed beyond the Ocean, to the New World, to the Western sky streaked with telegraph wires, and blackened with the smoke of innumerable factories and workshops. . . .

IV

Spanish Music

Madrid, 1898.

I should like now to speak of the ancient native music, that which bears the indelible stamp of the presence of the Moors and is a kind of blend between the languishing strains of Spain and the doleful tones of Arabia.

In France the national music of former days seems almost to be lost: old songs of Brittany, Béarn and Provence are dying out, or else are collected, from time to time, to lull and delight a few aesthetically sensitive individuals.

In Spain, however, from one end of the social

scale to the other, the music of the past has remained unchanged, in perpetual honour; nor has this present age, though so destructive in its effects, altered it to any extent. The lower classes understand it; as they listen some are filled with rapture and others moved to tears. For the upper classes and the true lovers of music, in addition to Bach, Wagner, and the modern composers, there is this old music of the *flamencos*, which is quite different, and which, by other means though with like intensity, arouses a "sense of the mystery of life."

To-day I have been invited to call on the Marquis de X——, after luncheon, when cigarette-smoking has begun, for the purpose of listening to two of these *flamencos*, wandering minstrels who commenced their career by singing on the highways, and are now famous bards.

The Marquis lives near the French Embassy, where I have already been hospitably received. I start on foot, loitering along the lonely streets with the noonday sun shining brightly. This is a new quarter consisting of broad, straight avenues and gardens, very attractive to the leisured classes. Just now the windows are all shut, for the city is silent and asleep. In the air floats a fine white powder which the watering-carts cannot keep down.

It may be imagination, all the same one really is conscious of a sense of anxiety weighing upon the whole of Madrid, filling all these mute dwellings and lurking behind these closed shutters.

The spring sun is already blazing upon me, though from time to time there comes a chilling blast from the mountains away on the horizon, with their still snow-clad peaks. This is the wind peculiar to Madrid, and of which the proverb says: "Though it could not put out a candle, it could easily put out a man."

I have reached the end of my journey, meeting scarcely a living soul; this intense quiet and absence of sound are a favourable preparation for the ancient music to which I am about to listen. Just at this moment, however, my ears catch the shrill sound of a bagpipe, accompanied by the beating of a tambourine to an Arab tune: two Andalusian beggars, with an ape, are standing at a cross-road, doing their best to earn a few coppers. No one heeds them in the slightest. The same kind of music might be heard in the streets of Mogador or Tetuan. It is strange that the Moors have left their mark so strongly on the music and dances of this nation, of the same race as our own, whilst they have had no influence whatsoever upon its architecture and ornamentation, statues and

paintings. This is so manifest, that the Arab and the Spanish styles almost represent two extreme poles: the one light and mystical, purely geometrical, all hoar-frost and crystallization; the other somewhat heavy and extremely material, instinct with the splendour and grace of the living form, of human pose and strength of muscle and sinew.

On reaching the house of the Marquis de X——, I found the blinds lowered as a protection against the burning heat. The salons were partially shaded, giving the impression of a Southern summer. Arranged according to modern—even Parisian—taste, were many ancestral souvenirs, testifying to the antiquity of the family: old swords and coats-of-arms, rare Spanish-Moor earthenware from Granada or Sevilla.

Quite a childlike household is that of my hosts to-day; they are both so young, about twenty and twenty-three. The youthful Marchioness is an ideal Spanish beauty—pure delicate features of dull-brown pallor, with long, velvety, jet-black eyes. Graceful and elegant, a patrician in every movement, she is delightful to behold, in her morning dress, as she sits somewhat carelessly in an old armchair. Only two or three intimate friends are present, and the reception accorded me is gracious, simple

and most polite. The whole place represents a charming type of a purely Spanish home in Madrid, into which strangers are, in all probability, but seldom received, though when this does happen, it is with such perfect good grace that they speedily regard themselves as belonging to the family.

At first a few remarks are made about the war, which now oppresses all hearts. Then, cigarettes of Levantine and Havannah origin are lit and smoked in a dreamy, melancholy silence, whilst we await the arrival of the *flamencos*. . . .

The two singers are late. Thereupon, some one suggests that we first listen to them in a phonograph, where some of their songs have previously been recorded. We all group round the extraordinary little box, listening to a sort of ghostly music: Andalusian voices, the passionate and amorous strains of which remind one of the puppet wrath of a Punch, guitar accompaniments, recalling the patter of hail upon a distant window. . . . Such ancient airs, repeated in Punch-and-Judy style by a phonograph, with coats-of-arms belonging to the Middle Ages on the walls around, form an altogether extravagant anachronism, and its ridiculous aspect is so irresistible that we burst into a fit of laughter, forgetful of

everything, in spite of the troubles looming ahead. . . .

At last the two *flamencos* enter, guitar in hand. They are fine country-looking men, with a dreamy, thoughtful expression in their eyes. Being true artists, they are received with the utmost courtesy.

Two other members of the family now appear, and finally the mother of our hostess, the dowager Marchioness of X——.

"Poor Spain!" remarks the latter, holding out a hand for me to kiss.

This is the only allusion made to the terrible situation of the country; for here the people retain their dignity in defeat and are almost needlessly scrupulous about inflicting their grievances on visitors.

Now we are all present and seated in a circle round the two Andalusian bards, ready to listen in the noonday silence of the darkened room.

After a short prelude the guitars begin to moan and wail beneath their fingers as never violin does in the hands of the greatest player. They give forth a plaintive strange desolate refrain in a lower key than that of the accompaniment.

One of the two bards now raises to heaven an inspired look, and then suddenly utters, in

a tenor voice, a loud piercing cry, which gradually dies away into something very soft and plaintive. Moreover, it is the characteristic of this almost Oriental music that it invariably begins with a prolonged cry of anguish and ends in a dying plaint. The melody is monotonous and somewhat wild, inexplicably reminiscent of something mysterious and far away, which moves the very depths of the soul, though it cannot be defined. The words, too, quite primitive for the most part, a kind of mountaineer's improvisation, are fierce and rugged in their poetic inspiration, and instinct with the eternal anguish of passion.

Aunque pases por mi vera
Tu ropa i la mia rocen,
No te han de mirar mis ojos
Por que los tuyos no grocen. . . .

(Though thou wert to pass so close to me
That thy garments gently rustled against mine,
Mine eyes would refrain from looking upon thee,
So that thine own may not be gladdened. . . .)

The young women, listening with bowed heads, are, as a matter of sheer atavism, predisposed to submit to the spell of this music; whilst I, a foreigner, who feel its charm in my own way, as through a veil, am probably incapable of understanding what is now taking place in the depths of their nature.

Toitas las aranas nigras
Que en el campo hacen nido
Me coman el corazon
Si este querer mio es fingido! . . .

(May all the black spiders,
That make their nests in the fields,
Eat away my heart,
Should my love prove false! . . .)

With flashing eyes, and warmer, passionate tones, the *flamencos* are carried away in their enthusiasm. . . .

Ni contigo ni sin ti,
Tienen mis males remedio
Contigo por que me matas
I sin ti por que me muero. . . .

(Neither with thee nor without thee
Is there any ease for my pain,
With thee because thou slayest me,
And without thee, because I am pining away. . . .)

Finally, they give a frenzied interpretation of Andalusian dances, those rapid, feverishly rhythmical dances, which savour of sunshine and love, perhaps too of war, the wars of past times when the Moors were near at hand, though such dances have never been gay. . . . And in this salon we begin to hear hands being clapped, beating time to the music. Oh! how suddenly *conscious one is* of being in Spain, a Spain of the past as well as of the

present, and how charming, how unlooked-for in an environment replete with every modern refinement!

"*Ollé! ollé!*" exclaim the men, striking their heels on the floor.

Ollé! Long live the lands that still retain their own native enthusiasm and ardour, their music and their bards! *Ollé! Ollé!* Long live the Spain of old, which is but slumbering beneath the Spain of to-day, and which can be awakened to life by the merest trifle: a poem, a song, a *furia* of guitars! . . .

V

More Music

Now we are at the other end of the social ladder, at its lowest rungs: one of those inns in Madrid crowded with men wearing broad-brimmed felt hats and wide girdles, poor-looking *toreros* and attendants of the *toril*, vagrants and street-prowlers. In the middle of the room is a platform containing two or three guitar-players and some chairs which will, later on, be occupied by women. Just now, there is an interval, and the women, who have been singing, are scattered amongst the men, whom they incite to drink. They are

all clad in gaudy rags and are poor specimens of womankind, with a fringy *crêpon de Chine* at the breast and a rose in their hair.

And yet this place, though of such ill repute, has a certain good-natured aspect about it; there is nothing disquieting or forbidding here, as in the slums of Paris.

The music is about to begin again, and yonder girl, who has been bandying such coarse jests with the men, is to sing; she mounts the platform; there is a moment's silence during which her face undergoes a change. She has an instinctive respect for the music and its mysterious power, respect for the song she is about to interpret, and which, like all Andalusian songs, is to tell once more of the ineffable pathos of love. . . .

What a difference between this girl and those who frequent the *cafés chantants* on the outskirts of Paris!

The prelude consists of a kind of shrill crackling sound, like that made by locusts in summer; then, whilst a light skipping motion continues on the middle strings, the bass chords faintly strike up a few vague strains suggestive of a dying youth's voice which had evidently once been of delightful sweetness, but is now faint and weak as the end approaches. The singer is listening, for the moment has

come to strike up a *Malaguénia*. As she prepares her voice for strange sounds, she also seems to be preparing her soul for what the song is about to relate; she sees nothing, animate or inanimate, around her; her eyes, half closed beneath the trembling eyelids, are concentrated in an inward gaze: she calls to mind some former lover, perhaps, for whom she suffered the mysterious anguish of love, before entering upon her present career. . . . Suddenly, opening wide her mouth, she utters a wild, piercing cry, filled with the infinite sadness of the Orient, reminding one of the shrill tone of the *hautbois* and the falsetto of the *muezzins* of Arabia. The old songs of Andalusia ever begin thus, with a cry of distress, repeating again and again, in one form or another, the anguish of love and death. In the inn not a sound is heard; the bronze-visaged, clean-shaven drinkers listen intently; their eyes, which but a moment ago were full of lowering bestiality, now reflect a far-away glory. The girl prolongs her cry whilst she has breath, then it gradually dies away in the lower notes, ending in a sort of minor key with a muffled trill: something scarcely perceptible, which, notwithstanding its inexpressible sadness, becomes as light and gay as the accompaniment of a guitar.

The succeeding strophes all begin with a like cry of anguish; they tell of a young *torero* whom destiny has separated from his *fiancée*, the result being that he dies broken-hearted. . . .

When the singer has finished, the delighted men fling their hats on to the stage, beseeching her to put them on her head, for a moment, one after another.

I even heard one of them, incapable of expressing higher praise, say to her: ...

"Compared with you, my dear, Charles the Fifth is unworthy of mention!"

She smiles modestly, momentarily ennobled and purified by the music. On repeating the song by request, she wears a grey, broad-brimmed *sombrero* to please her lover. With her sad, inscrutable eyes, she looks almost beautiful, almost chaste—though very soon she will be tipsy with wine. . . .

* * * * *

On these platforms, dancing is also carried on to the sound of guitars, the clapping of hands and the accompaniment of song. Generally it is one girl alone who performs an Andalusian dance, whilst the others, who are awaiting their turn, remain seated behind, their exclamations and the stamping of feet marking time.

This, too, reminds one of Arabia, as it evidently originated in certain dances practised

by the *almehs*. At first, what takes place is scarcely more than a series of attitudes, haughty or provocative, a slow balancing of the body, almost without stirring from the one spot, with strangely graceful poses and a delightful waving of bare arms. The head is flung back, lips parted and eyes closed, as though to invite a kiss—if this were bestowed, it seems as though the body would swoon away in rapture. . . . And the girl becomes almost pretty, though but a few moments ago she was ugly and vulgar-looking.

Then, the action quickens its pace and *becomes more precise*: the attitudes assumed are bolder, the body movements distinctly lascivious. . . . The dancer, who at first was merely pretty, now becomes an object of desire, owing to the graceful, serpent-like undulations which reveal the beauteous form beneath its scanty covering. The others on the platform excite her with cries; they call upon her by name: "Eh! la Juanita!" or "la Manolita!" or "la Carmen!" beating time by clapping their hands or stamping with their heels on the floor, and continually accelerating the measure until it becomes a frenzied revelry. Old Arabia! so mystic and so sensual, this is thy reincarnation after the flight of ages! . . . Arabia with its plaintive flutes and delightful

poetry, its furious dances and madding tambourines! . . . The drinkers' eyes flash beneath their sombreros. She twists about in delirious motion, this girl upon whom every one's gaze is fixed, and on to the very moment when she stops as though dying after a well-acted, final spasm of pain, all present seem fascinated by the rapid, rhythmic agitation of her entire frame.

The whole scene is brutal and crude; still, there is a sort of grandeur in this glorification of the flesh, for it never ceases to be taken seriously; these men belonging to the masses, who meet here for the gratification of ear and eye, wear no cynical smiling expression as in Paris; a certain ideal of beauty is ever present in their amusements. There is the same difference between the songs to which I have just been listening and the refrains of our *cafés chantants* as between this suggestive dance and the ignoble quadrille with its apish contortions so popular in the dances just outside the French capital. To descend to the depths of that low banter and ridicule of everything, which is our appanage, Spain must make still further *progress!* For several years yet she will have to enjoy the advantages of secular instruction and of a widely-diffused press—more especially in the direction of less

incense in her old cathedrals . . . less incense and fewer prayers.

VI

Leaving Madrid

It is morning, and I am alone in the Armoury of the Palace of Madrid, surrounded by a gruesome company of iron-clad figures, whose shields and helmets and gauntlets were worn by awe-inspiring princes in long-past days when tournaments were in fashion. Gradually, an ancient Spain, splendid and terrible, begins to return to life before my mind's eye, in the dead silence of that peerless museum.

From without, however, there suddenly comes to me an echo of the Spain of to-day; I hear the Royal March, played with slow solemnity by a military band: it is the parade of the halberdiers and hussars, and so I leave the company of stiff-looking figures and go outside to watch the usual morning march-past.

A bright May sun is shining upon the vast square, all white with dust, in the midst of white arcades and with the old white palace in the background. Preceded by a band, the red hussars who are to-day on duty, enter and replace the blue hussars who have been on

guard since yesterday. They advance at an extremely slow marching pace, as if dreading to approach this palace in which so many kings have died—though a charming infant-king is doubtless watching them through the half-open curtains of some window. This excessive slowness of arriving soldiers, combined with the muffled music produces an almost religious effect.

Hussars and halberdiers, without hastening their pace, execute marches and countermarches, a sort of martial quadrille. In accordance with unvarying ceremonial and pomp, those who are leaving repeat the orders, instructions and pass-words to those who replace them. From time to time, a horse, impatient of this sleepy pace, rears and prances, causing his steel trappings to jingle, then, when he has been brought under control, he returns into line.

The melancholy aspect of this spot is mainly due to the lonely country all around, which begins immediately one reaches the other bank of the Manzanares: strange distant scenes, glimpsed from time to time, or, at all events, *known to be there,* even though they may no longer be perceived.

The great white-looking square on which these few hundred men automatically go through their manœuvres is empty and

flooded with light. Beneath the shade of the opposite arches, a compact mass takes up its stand every morning. For the most part they belong to the lower classes, since any one is allowed to watch the parade and listen to the music. The sombre costumes of the people set off the colours of the uniforms as the hussars march past in the sunlight, the blue and red of the pelisses, the white glitter of steel, and the yellow of the brass instruments.

* * * * *

The parade is a long one ; the Royal March is repeated again and again, being occasionally played in noisier fashion, the better to emphasize the general effect of this sweet, low music. The sun is very hot, and so I return to the armed figures, where I am once more alone, this time in the " Armereria."

These figures in their carefully furbished arms, shine from head to foot. The most important ones are in rows under glass, the rest are grouped about in the centre of the room. Beneath the steel breast-plates and cuisses their short skirts may be seen, made of some ancient fabric and of gold-embroidered velvet, which, for the most part, were actually worn by the doughty knights of bygone days. As far as possible, the visors are lowered ; still, the attitudes presented by these wonderful

carapaces almost invariably express life: they even express the battlefield. Seated on horses covered with saddle-cloths and barbed with iron; steeds which seem ready to prance and rear, knights with magnificently plumed helmets appear as though they were holding their lance poised in the hand that is missing, all ready for the tournament. Some of the helmets and breast-plates are rare masterpieces of workmanship in gold. There is also a great deal of children's armour, the sport of youthful princes who afterwards became mighty rulers and are now mere dust, sealed away in the vaults of the Escorial. Care has been taken to inscribe, on paper or metal, the names of those to whom these warlike costumes belonged, and who brandished these swords: Charles the Fifth, Philip the Second, Boabdil. . . .

Only two or three centuries separate us from the period of human history at which these beetle-like ornaments were worn, when these plumes and standards waved in the breeze as armies went to war! And yet how distant it all seems!

Those were glorious times, especially for France and Spain, when war was something noble, even something elegant. Without going back so far; if Spain were but a century younger, when human valour still assured success in

battle, she would have little cause for anxiety at the hands of this industrial nation which is now attacking her; but present-day war, alas! has become an ugly thing, infected with the stench of coal, a chemical barbarity, and enemies beyond the ocean have more money and firearms, more shells and explosives. . . .

When I leave the "Armereria," the mid-day sun is blazing down upon the great square which is now quite deserted; there is not a soul in the neighbourhood of the palace. No doubt the young king has left for his usual walk in the quiet depths of the forest which extends to the very door of his home. And the queen, in the sumptuous though oppressive calm of those historic rooms is doubtless either engaged in work or plunged in meditation, ever serene and brave-hearted despite the anxieties of the hour.

Just now there are scarcely any outside except soldiers; Madrid begins to live and be filled with people only as evening approaches. In the *miradors* the curtains are closed, whilst a sultry wind continually fills the air with dust in this rainless country.

As I proceed along the streets to the French Embassy, I am constantly meeting soldiers, both foot and cavalry, martial in their bearing and superbly uniformed. Watching them file

past, one regains hope and confidence, in spite of everything. These are still the fine sturdy Spanish troops, heroic at all times and finally in their resistance to France during the war between our two nations, now forgotten and forgiven.

* * * * * *

It is my last day in Madrid, and with the setting sun I once more find myself at the palace, awaiting the pleasure of Her Majesty who has deigned to grant me an audience before my departure. Since my last visit, the disaster in connection with the Philippines has cast a veil of sadness over the whole of Spain, and in some indescribable fashion, these splendid halls, more silent and empty than ever, still bear the trace of sorrow and mourning. No doubt this impression of mourning exists only in my imagination, for there can be no sadness in things devoid of life. And yet, as the day is drawing to its close, the palace seems more deserted and gloomy than ever. There is no one in vestibule or passage; I lose myself in the thick-carpeted staircases, and occasionally ask my way of a halberdier as he automatically paces to and fro.

I admire the grave serenity apparent on the countenance of the Queen Regent. During the few minutes of this farewell audience, she

again speaks of the enemy's methods and practices which fill her loyal soul with stupor and amaze: their captures before the declaration of war, their unannounced bombardments, their shells wrapped in petrol-soaked cloth to set fire to the towns, all those daring infractions of the international laws of warfare with which Europe offers not the slightest interference. . . . All the same, Her Majesty seems to retain her original confidence in the ultimate triumph of justice, in the heroism of her soldiers and sailors who fell valiantly in the first one-sided fight—a battle lost before it was begun!—but who, it may be, have some gory surprises in store for America. . . .

A noble queen, whom destiny has brought in contact with extreme peril which she boldly faces without a murmur, anxious only to do her duty to the last! A queen, so stainless and upright that she inspires profound respect in those most hostile to her, so full of courage that she has struggled almost alone for eleven years to prepare the throne for her son, and, with a greater, a more self-sacrificing aim, to retain for her country, so essentially monarchical and religious, that monarchy without which true peace and stability would yet be impossible for many a year to come.

* * * * *

It is quite dark when, an hour after leaving the palace, I cross Madrid for the last time, on my way to the station, to catch the train for France. It is a bright, warm May night; the sky is lit with innumerable stars, whilst thousands of lights blaze in the city streets. The usual evening crowds pass along, as also do endless streams of elegant carriages. No one has yet changed his mode of living, no one appears with bowed head; the entire nation is one with its sovereign in feelings of confidence, or at all events, of resignation and proud expectancy.

And just as my carriage, with many others, is being swallowed up in the dismal court of the "Norte" station, I turn round once more for a last look at the royal palace. It rises above the commonplace railway buildings from its proud heights looking down upon the Manzanares, all glowing in the light of the full moon. The beautiful building gives an impression of solidity and strength, and, in spite of these momentary troubles, stands there, a witness to stability and power, the symbol of a principle that is immutable. . . .

SERENADES

HENDAYA, *June* 1898.

THE rosy dawn of a June day, the dreaded hour, the hour of anguish and awakening, which, after a night of dreams and tranquil cessation of being, brings back too vivid thoughts, too definite ideas regarding the brevity of life and the catastrophe that ends it.

The blinds are closed so that the radiant light may not immediately enter my room; the windows are flung wide open to afford entrance to the warm sea-breezes.

Throughout the short night, my lonely dwelling has been wrapt in silence, but now that the first blush of morn has appeared, I hear the various sounds of village and country, sounds which are but dimly perceived in a half-waking condition: the distant serenade of chanticleer; the embarking of some fisherman for the open sea; the rhythmic grind of oars, and songs of Spain floating up from the river below. . . .

It is scarcely light, and my confused eyes cannot yet distinguish more than the mass effect of the objects about me: vague outlines of furniture and large white panes of glass.

Close to my head I hear a quick, regular, and monotonous sound, the faint tick of a watch hanging against the wall and which appears to be in a feverish haste to keep pace with the flight of time. Quick, quick run the sands of time is the first thing that I am told when I awake, by the little machine whose tiny wheels turn in never-ceasing revolutions. Quick, quick fly seconds, minutes, and hours. . . . Immobility and silence are but illusions; days and years, earth and worlds are carried away in the same maddening course, the same whirling vortex. . . . And I, a negligible nothing compared with the immensities which will also pass away, a creature of a day, my life is even now more than half spent. . . . *Mon Dieu!* what ruins along my backward track—what things I should yet like to bring to pass before I die, how much I should like to revise, to complete and understand. . . . Never shall I be able to do it all, so swift is the flight of time; seconds, minutes, and hours. . . . And to-morrow will bring old age and the end, the awful pit of oblivion. . . .

Meanwhile, the earth as it hastily revolves

on its axis, and the light filtering through the closed blinds, become more real; objects stand out in greater prominence. By degrees I grow calmer and forget all about planetary velocities and headlong falls into space. I quickly regain that well-known, deceptive consciousness of a little time ahead, and of a stoppage in its awful flight, a little leisure and breathing space whilst waiting for death. . . . Before long, the intense agony of coming to so speedy an end fades away once more, like a mirage. . . .

Then, in renewed mental activity, our usual worries and regrets, remorse and care and desire, again make their appearance, more distinct and heart-rending than ever. . . .

No doubt, the sun will be shining before long. Beneath my window, I hear a faint twittering of birds in the branches, at first hesitating, brief, and immediately interrupted. There is a response, then another. . . . I remember them so vividly for I have frequently watched these songsters when they awake, little balls of ruffled feathers, shaking their dewy plumage, and preening their wings in joyful eagerness to greet the dawn.

At intervals, another sound reaches my ears, —from the distant shore, doubtless,—the faint cry of some little animal forsaken and dying. I immediately think of one of those little

cats which the people of the district are in the habit of flinging on to the beach when they wish to destroy them, without even taking the trouble to throw them into the water, where, at all events, the end would come more speedily.

These joyous forest songsters are now all awake; and suddenly a mighty hubbub arises, a comical though delightful sound. All together, in one grand chorus, sparrows, linnets, and all the finch tribe, sing away as though they would split their tiny throats, in the joy and frenzy of testifying to the birth of so glorious a day. The wail of the dying kitten is drowned and speedily forgotten, for I am now listening to an inevitable morning concert, the delirious greeting of the rising sun. I know that this concert takes place just wherever each songster happens to be, hopping to and fro, and daintily turning his head in every direction. It lasts a quarter of an hour, on an average, and then, as though in obedience to a signal, suddenly stops. The little birds, without a further thought, hurry off to attend to their own affairs; the building of nests, the search after seeds and flies.

Silence—followed by the wail of the dying little creature, a faint, mournful, tremulous sound piercing the warm morning air of this

June day. I must show pity, and answer its appeal by putting it out of its agony.

I glide to the ground by the aid of a rope, both because this is an incorrigible gymnastic habit of mine and also because I do not wish to arouse any one. It is an unusually early hour, half-past four, perhaps five o'clock. All the inmates of the house are sunk in slumber; the very servants who are accustomed to begin the day by a plunge in the river, are not yet stirring.

It really is from yonder beach that the wail of distress comes. How far it carries, that feeble dying voice which has perhaps not yet lived through a single day! . . . What mysterious instinct impels it thus to call for help? By whom does it expect to be heard?

I descend the stone stairs of the terrace. All around is light and splendour. On the Bay of Biscay, which at this moment resembles an eternally peaceful azure lake, rise the Cantabrian Mountains, daintily outlined, high above the surface of the water, and shining with the rising sun. A delightful sense of peace is in the warm, life-giving air. Merely to breathe is a boon in itself, a thing of frenzied delight. The earth seems full of joy and promise to man, beast and plant. It is some-

what ironically disconcerting, in the silence of such an enchanting dawn, to listen to the death-agony of a creature which, though apparently insignificant, was yet the abode of a poor little soul—and which, moreover, had done no harm, had not even asked to live at all.

It is low-water tide, and the sea is far out here at the mouth of the river. On the grey shore, extending in smooth regular stretches, I perceive a small wet object, which is also grey—this is the being that uttered the cry of pain I had heard; a tiny thing, the germ of an animal, without strength to stand upright, and which was doubtless injured on being flung there, for its head is half buried in mud and slime.

With mingled feelings of pity and horror, I pick it up, expecting to see the dainty little face of a kitten; but the mouth is longer, coarser and more commonplace than a kitten's; it is a pup. . . . Oh! the funny, ugly face, with its great foetus eyes still closed and lips already stiffened in a death grimace. Throughout the whole of nature there is no combination of circumstances more baffling than this: the mark of death stamped on the features of an embryo. . . .

The little body, however, is still quite warm,

in spite of the water which streams from it; its limbs relax and the body turns round in my hand. So long as it has life I hesitate to kill it. Besides, it has now stopped wailing, as though the contact of some living thing had already given it a vague sense of confidence and appeasement.

A momentary indecision comes over me as I look upon that little pink mouth, writhing in agony. What am I to do with the little thing, after all? Would it even be possible to prolong its existence?

Then there come to my mind the following words: "Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you." . . . Ah, yes, if my first cry had but been stifled in the waters of some river, what anguish I should have escaped! Whereupon, picking up a large flat stone, I make my way to the mirror-surfaced water, so warm and pleasant, so seemingly beneficent and joyous, like the whole of nature, this beautiful June morning. Into it I plunge the moaning little animal, covering its head with the stone, and through the limpid water I see its poor little frame writhe, and then, after a final quiver, remain there motionless. It is all over; the tiny grey body will moan and cry no more.

All around is silence and radiant splendour.

Alone once more, I return to my peaceful abode, to the rope which will enable me noiselessly to re-enter my room—somewhat pensively, all the same, for I have just constituted myself an agent of death. . . .

TRAMPS

HENDAYA, 10*th August* 1898.

FOR the past two weeks the Spanish light-houses on the Bay of Biscay have not been lit at night. On the top of the rugged brown cliff rising abruptly before us, just where Spain begins, we no longer see that great red eye which was wont to shed its circular glow every night over the horizon. Evidently the same thing is happening all along the Cantabrian Mountains; the lights are extinguished from fear of attracting the enemy and favouring an attack by night on the part of the American fleet. We seamen, accustomed to consider the light of the beacons almost as certain and immutable as that of the stars, are conscious of a strange sense of sadness and uneasiness emanating from the whole stretch of this dark, sombre coast.

The roads of France, too, close to the frontier, become daily more peopled with beggars of every kind: some who have long been pro-

fessionals in the trade; the rest mere novices, poor folk who but recently were tilling the ground and earning their bread in farm or mill. The poverty and destitution, alas! of our neighbours are beginning to increase.

There are no more deserters to be seen, doubtless because the national peril is now understood by all. Last year, however, when Cuba alone was at stake, they passed along this way in hundreds and thousands, youths from the Spanish-Basque districts, terrified at the thought of fever, famine, and death in its numberless vague and awful aspects away in that distant land.

They would meet at night on the public square or at a crossing to dance the fandango, clacking their castanets in joyous bravado, though often with looks of distress in their eyes. They were, moreover, encouraged to escape by Carlists, who promised them a coming change of king, followed by a general amnesty. And they left in troops for "les Amériques." (This is the name given to Montevideo and Buenos Ayres, which are partially peopled by colonies of Basques.) For two years, at least, the very life-blood of Spain has been drained by this gradual infiltration of young soldiers across our frontier. Often did I hear the girls of Guipuscoa say mournfully:

"Who will marry us now? There are no young men left in our villages! . . ."

The desertions are over at last, and the roads belong to ragged tramps, singers or guitar-players, all the vagrants on Spain's highways whom poverty and misery are pouring into France.

From morning until evening, on the road leading past my garden may be heard the tramping of the maimed and the crippled, of blind men and half-clad children, of old women trudging along with the aid of a stick. They come right to my door, which they tap with their dry, shrivelled hands.

"*Ave, Maria purissima!*" they all say as an initial greeting, repeated again and again.

They ask for coppers, bread, wearing apparel. Amongst them are poor old lonely women, their cadaverous faces enveloped in a black shawl—perhaps once they were pretty and awakened feelings of affection and admiration! . . . Hobbling along by jerks and starts, like machines that quickly get out of order, they continue their journey. There is such sadness in their plaintive voices and frequently honest looks, and many of them seem torn by a racking cough! *Ave, Maria purissima!* . . . Do they even believe in the serene white Virgin, who still smiles upon them in the churches and holds

out her arms in pity to those who have no other hope? . . . Whence come they, to be so tired? Where have they slept, and where will they go to find an uncertain shelter to-night? They are most pitiable to behold when twilight falls, and they go coughing along the wet roads, in the pouring rain, all worn out and spent. Still, as they are repulsive to look at, and more especially as there are so many of them, in our calculating pity, we give a trifle and send them away, forgetting them the next moment.

Sometimes, instead of the invariable Latin prayer, I hear music under my window; an attempt is made to extract sweet notes from some old tambourine, stringless guitar, or foul mandoline: poor old blind folk, with eyelids eaten away, natives of Sevilla or Granada, singing trios and quartets in doleful accents, droning out passionate or languid refrains expressive of Andalusian love.

Amongst the "regulars," who arrive on fixed days, are some quite small children of five or six, delightfully droll little beings with beautiful roving eyes, already carrying a stick and a wallet like grown-up persons, trudging along quite alone, and even at this age muttering their *Ave, Maria purissima!* which they accompany with a bow.

These, at all events, have the future before them; perhaps some day they will be handsome and strong, the objects of love and admiration. . . . Whereas the old folk! . . . To think that they have nothing more to expect than a hole in the cemetery where they may rot away, when Death chances to pass along and his sickle mows them down! Why are they so obstinately bent on remaining alive? In view of what paltry earthly joys, moments of comfort or diminution of suffering, do they carefully cherish their bodies beneath these rain-logged rags? *Mon Dieu!* To think of what it means to live through a forsaken old age, crouching alone, on wintry nights, behind some wall, without the faintest hope of friendship or even of a little kind attention or sympathy! . . .

* * * * *

A couple of Spaniards, stranded on a heap of stones in front of my door, told me their story somewhat as follows:

"Two years ago, we were small farmers in Navarra. To buy off our son, who was to go to Cuba, we first sold our cattle; the year after, the next class having been summoned to the ranks, he was again under compulsion to leave, in spite of the great sacrifice we had made; consequently, we sold our field as well, so that

he might have the wherewithal to desert to 'les Amériques.' . . ."

I do not think that the horror of all this, which is carried on in all civilized lands, had ever before appeared to me in so vivid a light: forcibly depriving poor people of their only son, and sending him away to fight in the colonies! *Mon Dieu!* Let there be volunteer or mercenary armies raised, if need be, for such a purpose, but let the poor young peasants who now have to be torn away from village and hamlet be kept as a reserve force for the defence of the country itself!

"We came on foot to France," they continued, "hoping to obtain work; but we have found none."

"What became of your son?"

"He died of fever on reaching Buenos Ayres."

"And where are you going now?"

"Now? . . . Ah! We don't know. . . . Straight on . . . along the highway. . . ."

Straight on, along the highway, unknowing where! Think of it. These two humble peasants, who but recently owned their farm in Navarra, will in all likelihood be tramps until the end comes and they drop dead on the road. They are going straight on! There must be some frenzied attraction, or else a kind of

oblivion, in this wandering life: the fate of so many of the disinherited of this world.

* * * * *

Yesterday, from my window, I saw a man come along, all bent and trembling, with a large black box fastened to his back. Instead of saying, "*Ave, Maria purissima!*" I heard him parleying with my servants, and so I listened. The language was not that of the usual tramps of the district, there was a Brittany accent in it.

"I wish to speak to M. Loti," he implored. "I am very anxious to see him. He knew me long ago, at the time of the war with China; he was captain of my company. . . ."

To have served under me so long ago as that! It was scarcely likely; however, I rang the bell and gave orders that he should not be sent away.

On going down to speak to him, he removed his cap.

"*Ah! mon capitaine,*" he said, trembling with emotion, "you do not recognize me? . . ."

No, indeed, I did not recognize him in the least.

"Cloarec, my name is Cloarec. . . . Do you not remember? . . . I was master of the dingey, on board the *Atalante*. . . ."

He spoke in painful, broken accents, whilst a morbid trembling seemed to shake every limb. Looking at him more attentively, I saw that he was not an old man, in spite of the awful state of decrepitude in which I found him: from thirty-five to thirty-eight, about the age of all the sailors who went through the Chinese campaign with me.

"I belonged to your company . . . *mon capitaine*. . . . You gave me double marks, on Sundays . . . because I was clean. . . ."

He was as unsightly as a poor, beaten, sick dog, with his suppliant sunken eyes, and was wearing a seaman's hooded cloak—one of those that retired sailors keep as long as they live, for they never wear out—whilst the old discoloured ribbon of a Tonquin medal could still be seen at his buttonhole.

"I have my *livret* in my box still . . . and the certificate you gave me, *mon capitaine*! . . . As I was passing Dax, I heard that you were here . . . and so I wanted to come. . . ."

And, in fact, he showed me his seaman's *livret*, all worn and dirty, upon which I recognized my signatures of long ago. It had for years been on the roads of France in this tramp's box. Then, to avoid causing him pain, I pretended to recognize him. His certificates testified to a splendid record: "Conduct

irreproachable ; served with zeal and honour." Not a single punishment. Then followed a marginal note, signed by myself : " Took part in the bombardment of Tuan-An."

The bombardment of Tuan-An ! With strangely sad feelings I once again saw the red sands of Anam, beneath that great devouring sun, that coast all aflame with our shells, the sinister black smoke rising from the blazing villages. How far away, buried in the mists of time, seemed all this, now brought back to memory by a torn scrap of paper and this shaking old man ! . . .

" Just look, *mon capitaine,* my poor certificate is nearly in pieces through showing it to so many people. . . . However careful I am, I cannot make it hold together. . . ."

Suddenly his eyes, plaintive as a beaten dog's, filled with tears at the thought that this dear relic of his, the most precious thing he possessed on earth, would soon be gone.

" It was during the fishing in Iceland, in bad weather, that I had a heavy fall . . . and it left me all shaking and broken up, as you see. I cannot work . . . and I am all alone in the world. . . . And so I earn my living as well as I can on the highroads . . . selling stationery and pins . . . songs at fairs. . . ."

When I had stocked his modest purse, my

servant, who had recently been a sailor, also feeling moved with pity, laid out a table in the garden, well in the shade, and served our guest with a copious luncheon.

"You may come back for dinner to-night," he added, when the poor man had finished, "and to-morrow also if you are in these parts."

"Oh! You are too kind! . . . You are too kind, *mon capitaine*. . . . No, I must go away. . . . There is a fair to-morrow, you see, at Saint-Jean-de-Luz; perhaps I shall earn a little money with my pins. . . ."

Before leaving, he opened his box and wished to offer my servant one of his song-books as a souvenir.

"Oh no," said the latter. "Keep it. . . . You will be able to sell it."

"But the words are not at all bad, see! It will help to pass away the time. . . ."

His heart was sore at finding his humble present thus scorned. And his poor moist eyes looked sadly up at the young man, whose own keen dark ones, usually so indifferent, had now assumed an expression of profound pity.

"Very well, then, give it to me; I will take it. Many thanks. . . . It will help to amuse me at nights. . . ."

Thereupon he took his departure, thanking us again and again. Gradually his bent back

and trembling frame disappeared behind the foliage of the garden.

My servant, the song-book in his hand, watched him as he went and stood there in pensive attitude at the thought of such a fate befalling an old sailor who, notwithstanding, had wronged no man, and whose conduct was blameless.

By accepting the gift and saying that it "would amuse him at nights," he had given proof of an even more touching sense of compassion than when, shortly before, he had carefully laid out the little dining-table for the tramp, well in the shade.

MY LAST TWO HUNTS

To the Comtesse de Lariboisière

October 1898.

THE following are two short accounts of adventures that took place some time ago. I dedicate them to the charming countess who was so kind, last week, as to invite me to hunt on her property in Brittany.

I dedicate them also to several of my friends, to whom hunting is an habitual pleasure.

I

Uneasy slumber fell upon my tired body as I lay there, stretched on a strange bed of green, with arms folded. Unknown trees covered me with their shade, and, close by, between the reeds, glistened the blinding surface of an equatorial marsh.

As frequently happens on occasions of extreme fatigue, the sense of torpor that had

supervened left me but a vague notion of my surroundings, with which dreamy imaginary events mingled from time to time.

Soon I felt disturbed by the almost physical sense of a *presence*, very slight, true, though real and close at hand; I was conscious of being watched—then I half opened my eyelids in an effort to see.

And there, actually, close to me, was the tiny face of a gnome grinning through the branches. Two round and very lively eyes, just like a child's, winked away and examined me with an expression of the most intense human curiosity. In obedience to one of those aggressive impulses lurking in the inmost depths of us all when hunting, I stretched out my hand for my gun. . . .

Being only a half-intention, the action was ineffective, my hand fell back to my side, and sleep, becoming more imperious than ever, overcame me for a few minutes.

The little face, however, continued to watch me, and, though asleep, *I knew it.* In the surrounding silence I also heard the humming sound caused by the flight of the long dragon-flies, wing and body shining with a metallic glint, the buzz of innumerable insects, armed and plumed, dancing about in the warm, fragrant air, which, though stifling in its effect

upon my own human constitution, proved a very medium of exuberant life to whole worlds of dangerous beasts and great poisonous plants.

Gradually I became fully awake, beneath the obstinate glance of that little animal perched there in the branches; my arm was again stretched out to grasp my weapon, slowly and treacherously, and I silently raised it to my shoulder.

Thereupon the young ape began to beat a retreat. . . . Oh! there was no hurry about it, no appearance of mistrust; he went away with seeming regret, taking wary and even comical precautions against making a noise. He glided skilfully through the foliage, his long tail trailing behind in the drollest fashion. And he turned round to look at me again, as though to say: "I feel certain you have no evil intentions against me, for I was doing nothing wrong; I was only inquisitive, that is all. . . . Still, one never knows, and that machine in your hand is not a very pleasant thing to look at. . . . I really think I had better get away. . . . Don't be cross with me: I am going, you see, I am off now. . . ." And there, a little farther away, I saw two other full-grown apes, doubtless the parents of the little one, calling upon him to return.

For two or three seconds I took aim. Suddenly a formidable sound broke the silence, scattering the leaves in every direction, starting flocks of birds screaming, and awakening numbers of wild beasts slumbering in the shade. A giant moth, larger than my outspread hand, flew up from an ebony-tree, a blue metallic flash appearing with each beat of its wings. The body of the young ape began to roll slowly from branch to branch, in spite of a final desperate effort to hang on to the tree with his agile fingers; then, suddenly giving up the attempt, he fell swiftly to the ground, where he lay stretched at my feet.

When I picked him up he was still breathing, though the life in his body was too feeble to make any attempt at resistance. Like some dead object, he allowed himself to be taken; his little pinched lips trembled and his innocent eyes looked into mine with an expression of mingled agony, terror, and reproach that I shall never forget.

Only then was I fully aware of all the horror and stupidity of my deed. I held him tenderly in my arms, softly stroking his poor dying head. The two others, whose young one I had killed, began to gnash their teeth and scream aloud from the top of a neighbouring tree, divided between the fear of being killed also and the

desire to scratch and bite me. And there, lying almost confidingly in my arms like some little child, with his forehead on my breast, the little thing died. Never before had I felt with such exasperating intensity the need which often comes over me to heap insults upon my own head.

"Oh, you brute!" I exclaimed, with clenched teeth, "you stupid brute!"

II

It was five years after the murder of this ape before I handled any other firearms than those required in naval warfare. Doubtless, however, my lesson had not been a sufficiently severe one, for, as it happened, I took part in another hunt.

This time I was far from the splendour of an equatorial forest, and now found myself amid the rugged solitude of grey stones and undergrowth in a quiet corner of the island of Mitylene beneath an uncertain March sky. My ship for the time being—quite a small despatch-boat—tossed about for the past forty-eight hours by equinoctial squalls, had sought refuge in a tranquil bay of this island. A sudden calm had followed the storms of the open sea, so there was practically nothing for me to do.

On the neighbouring bank was a wild hamlet, the abode of herdsmen and pirates, and, farther on, only rocky waste land; nothing of an inviting nature or calculated to induce us to disembark.

Nevertheless, the singing of birds was heard on every hand, in myrtle and fennel—and a friend of mine on board, who had been indisposed for some time and was tired of eating our unappetizing fare, spoke to me in the following insidious terms:

"Since you have nothing to do, won't you go and fetch me a dozen of those little songsters for my dinner this evening?"

Thoughtlessly I picked up my gun and started. The joyous music of the birds seemed quite out of harmony with the dull and gloomy country around.

For the first eleven, things went tolerably well; I fired at them from a distance and picked them up, still and dead, without seeing them suffer.

A stern lesson, however, awaited me at the twelfth: all this took place eighteen years ago and it proved to be my last hunt.

But how shall I tell my readers of the indelible impression left on my mind? The bird was but a humble tomtit, at which I had taken aim from but a few yards' distance, and cut

short its song by death ; an infinitely less tragic affair than the death-struggle of the ape. No doubt a slow process of mingled compassion and clairvoyance had been at work within me ever since the former hunt : I was no longer the unfeeling individual of past years. Besides, I had only just left Stambul on this very ship ; the charm of my Mussulman life had recently been broken, and that for ever. The consequence was that the little island of Mitylene this corner of Turkish territory on which the hazards of a sea-life had thrown me, now predisposed me to an emotional state of mind impossible to fathom. . . . But a few days before I had again been conversing in the language of the Osmanli Turks with an old goatherd whom I had met, and here I recognized the very flowers that bloom in March all around the Bosphorus, sweet-scented daffodils and large violet anemones.

And so it was in this island, deep in a cool sheltered ravine, that I fired my last cartridge as a sportsman. A sunbeam, the harbinger of spring calm, was beginning to pierce the clouds, and every living thing in the air burst into a louder greeting of song. Close by, on a crag surrounded by blossoming fennel, came and perched a tomtit with pretty, confiding air ; in a frenzy of life and motion, gaiety and

sweetness, it looked up at another of its species flitting about, and began to sing, in full-throated delirium of joy and expectancy. . . . Mechanically obedient to that inseparable brute which forms the *double* of each one of us, I shouldered my weapon, and the shot beat upon it, quenching for ever the melodious strains that its throat had been pouring forth ; in less than a second its exquisitely graceful little body was no more than a poor, bleeding mass destined to become a mouthful of meat between the grinding teeth, and then deep in the stomach of a human ogre. . . .

Oh ! those daffodils and anemones that a beloved hand, with henna-tinted nails, had but the previous day brought to my abode in Stambul, those flowers of an Oriental spring, discovered once again in this lonely ravine and beneath a lowering sky, when I thought I should never see them more ! And this dainty little being, vibrant with life, trustingly pouring forth by my side its song of love ! And my brutality in destroying it ! . . . No, I shall never be able to explain how all this is mysteriously blended in my mind, nor to express to another why I was so long pursued by feelings of remorse, by infinite sorrow at having perpetrated such a crime. . . . This poor story of my final hunt has again filled my soul with

thoughts inexpressible. I now see that my account of the poor ape was a more appropriate one, and I certainly ought to have stopped after relating it.

* * * * *

To think that, every day, there are numbers of people—no worse than the rest, *mon Dieu*! —who delight in committing such murders, *find pleasure in killing*, and bring back in their game-bag poor maimed birds without even having had the decency to give them the finishing stroke, birds that have been in agony for hours and are lying half-suffocated between the little corpses of their fellow-creatures! . . .

And pigeon-shooting! Could there be anything more absurd or brutalizing than this pastime indulged in by certain fashionable snobs?

And the big hunting-parties, apparently so elegant and refined! In sporting articles, at the end of an account of one of those butcheries during which the poor stag is said to weep,—for stags, when bitten by the hounds, shed real tears,—whenever my eyes fall upon the traditional phrase stating that *les honneurs du pied have fallen to the graceful and accomplished Mademoiselle X*——, I picture to myself the young monster smiling at this death-offering, and a feeling of repugnance comes over me,

ten times stronger than I should experience at the sight of a young maiden of the Carribee islands, impelled by hunger to devour a piece of human flesh.

And what of the izards, the few remaining chamois? Every one knows these pretty harmless animals, which live in herds on the Pyrenees, and which man, in his insensate folly, will soon have exterminated. Quite recently a cultured artist, in other respects kind and intelligent, was telling me that he had been camping on the mountains for the purpose of hunting them. He had been so lucky, it appears, as to kill eight, and as he had no use for them, had left them lying on the spot where they had fallen! . . . He was my host, consequently I did not dare to say to him:

"I would far rather make friends with a man who kills another on the highway than with you, for he, at all events, has the merit of incurring a certain danger; he, at least, has the excuse that he is poor. . . ."

* * * * *

In these modern times, when all kinds of new and subversive ideas are being discussed in this mighty welter of mill and forge, we find venerable old fogies dreaming of suppressing warfare—warfare which chemists, alas! will speedily undertake to make impossible, though

it was the one sublime school in which alone strength, valour, and self-sacrifice were to be learnt; warfare which, in its old-fashioned form, at all events, should perhaps have been upheld with as much care as the faith of our ancestors.

But what of hunting! Will no one make a stand against hunting, which, doubtless, in bygone days possessed a utility, a grandeur, and even a nobility of its own; but which, in these modern times, and in these countries of ours, is but an occasion of petty cruelty, at once vulgar and cowardly?

FAREWELL TO THE BASQUE COUNTRY

November.

Adio, Euskualleria! is the beginning of a song by the bard Yparraguire. . . . These two words are constantly recurring to my mind, with their melancholy accompaniment, just when I, like the bard of old, am about to leave this part of the world.

Adio, Euskualleria! The words of Yparraguire are also a kind of autumn refrain, for in my mind they have become inseparable from the Novembers of the Basque country, gloomy though light Novembers, with the warm sun still shining, whilst the foliage lies in heaps along the roads and the great russet plane leaves accumulate on the door-steps of the houses and along the paths of my neglected garden. It was in autumn that I first visited the bard's village, in the heart of the province of Guipuscoa, and learnt that farewell song composed by him in the old Euskarian five

tempi rhythm. It is in autumn also that I am to leave this spot, and so *Adio, Euskualleria!* brings back to my mind a vague connection between dead leaves and the idea of departure.

Within a few days, a very few days, I shall be far away. And in every human soul there is a feeling of profound sadness when leaving any one spot of this old earth of ours, in which a prolonged stay has been made.

Never had I dreamed that my stay in the Basque land would extend over seven years. True, I took occasional trips to Arabia or elsewhere, though I was always certain to return. I had a lonely little house, which, all the time I was away, remained with closed shutters, and where, on my return, I found the same little things in the same places, faded flowers of past summers in the drawers, etc. . . . I had gradually become attached to the very soil and mountains of the land, the dull peaks of the Jaiz-Guibel, visible from terrace and windows. When we become too tired, too weary of life to become attached to human beings as in the past, this love of the land and of things inanimate alone remains to prolong our suffering. . . .

This year I have had a delightful autumn—my last one. The roads that lead from the

house to where my ship is anchored are covered with flowers, as though we were in June. The ship is at the bend of the Bidassoa, over against the red stone bridge, ornamented with the arms of France and Spain, and joining, by way of the river, these two friendly countries. These roads, along which I pass almost daily, at the same hours, are lined with November blooms: here and there are sprigs of honeysuckle or privet, or even sweet-briar, peering fresh and gorgeous from the ruddy-tinted foliage. Blue and motionless are the great stretches of ocean and mountain, a glorious sight, away in the distance. . . .

Adio, Euskualleria! Shall I ever return? Who can say? . . . Already I have begun to bid farewell to my Basque friends who live inland.

* * * * *

To-day I am in the village of Ascain, staying with my comrade Otharré, one of the best *pelota* players in France.

I arrived at sunset, and, as usual, found Otharré and his good wife beneath their arch-shaped plane-trees, in a verdure-decked room arranged in Basque fashion, between their old house and the ancient tomb-encircled church, one side of which overlooks the village square and the tennis-court. Frequently during the

past seven years have I sat in this charming, peaceful spot where there is nothing commonplace or modern to offend the eye ; I have even worked beneath its shade, listening to the chants and prayers in the neighbouring church, but now a feeling comes over me that it will be long before I visit the spot again. I ask to see the little ones, who always appear to me terribly scared, and can only speak the old Euskarian tongue. Then, on saying how sorry I am to leave without paying a final visit to the village of Sare :

" We have time to go there, if you wish," remarks Otharré. " I will harness the horses at once, we will dine there, and I can bring you back to Saint-Jean-de-Luz in time for the last train ; before eleven to-night you will be back in Bidassoa."

En route, then, without wasting any time, for a farewell drive to this mountain village which once had such charm for me. We proceed at a steady trot between carpets of ferns which look as though blood-stained, along shady paths strewn with dead leaves, whilst the great peaks around are still illumined with the sun's golden rays. It reminds me of the time, now so long ago, when I wrote *Ramuntcho*, and, under the guidance of Otharré, frequented smugglers' villages and frontier inns.

FAREWELL TO BASQUE COUNTRY

As twilight advances, we reach Sare, where, as in the past, we order supper at the inn. In the lonely village the entire life of the place every evening is focussed on this tennis-court square: children run about in play; maidens collect in twos and threes; men returning from the fields stop for a chat. Whilst supper is preparing and Otharré is arranging future tennis matches, I proceed alone to pay a farewell visit to the church and the cemetery.

Daylight is just disappearing as I reach this abode of peace and death. The high overhanging mountain is no more than a dark mass; it obstructs the pale vermilion-tinted sky from which the gold is fading away. The gentle nuns, all dressed in black, file along the paths leading to the tombs, with blossoming rose-trees all around; then the *angelus*, just overhead, begins to ring out in the peaceful twilight. The church and cemetery in this far-away village might be said to form the very heart of the old Basque country. . . . To-night, in this ancient, well-preserved spot, from which so many prayers have been offered up, deep within my soul there momentarily arises a sense of resignation to soothing death, and at the sound of the *angelus*, amid these tombs and autumn rose-trees, in the quiet darkness, a deep religious peace comes over me. . . .

There, above the Eastern mountains, a great blood-red orb begins to rise: the moon, that emblem of eternal death, throws back my mind into the abyss of time, the unfathomable beginnings of things, and all the lure and delusion of a faith which, for a few moments, had been so soothing in the quiet cemetery, vanishes before this rose-coloured ball.

Oh! the fright, I might almost say the horror this moon causes me, when it appears so close at hand, so near to the things of this earth, a sinister object, whose immutable eternity seems to defy our poor little ephemeral souls, our paltry thoughts on immortality. . . . In some inconceivable past, from what immeasurable distances has it come to cool down and congeal there, chained by a monotonous eternity to this Earth which caught it up on its passage? . . . Truly one is overwhelmed by the idea that it will always and inevitably be there, showing its leprous and lifeless face at the same hour, a kind of filthy scoria attached to us, and from which nothing, even after innumerable centuries, will ever be able to set us free. . . .

* * * * *

It is cold to-night—the cold and gloom of early November—in the room of this inn where the table is set, and there reaches us from below

the refrain of a slow, almost religious old song, the chorus of which is repeated again and again by mountaineers. But when supper is over and we are once more outside, we might almost persuade ourselves that it is summer, so mild and warm is the air that reaches us from the South. The village is flooded with a great white light, and the full moon is now high overhead, no longer red and leaden as at its rise, but light and radiant. . . . How strange the distance now looks! Suddenly, with the approach of evening, dense vapoury mists have risen from marsh and river, and all the valleys beneath appear submerged in a swelling ocean of snow-white billows. This old tennis-court square, this ancient church, this spot belonging to a bygone age, all seem more separated than ever from the rest of the world, now that they are above the clouds.

With the same speed that we came, a return must now be made, and so we quickly find ourselves in this fleecy mist for a couple of hours' journey through village and wood. The moist wind beats in our face and we are soon dripping with dew. The silence of the country is broken only by the tolling of bells for curfew or funeral, or by some watch-dog's bark which gives forth a muffled sound in the dense mist. From time to time we halt before inns where

cider is retailed, and the songs of Yparraguire are to be heard; my companion requests permission to stay for a few moments, so that he may make arrangements for *pelota* matches, and this gives me an opportunity to bid farewell to these good peasant friends whose acquaintance I have made at some Basque festival or other, and whom I may never see again. On leaving a place it is the custom to shake hands with any one who may be present, as though all were friends alike. Besides, this evening, I feel that I shall be away for a long time, and there appears before my eager vision a mental image of that luminous, unchanging Orient to which I am about to return. I catch faint glimpses, dim outlines of those glorious cities, with their enchanting names: Baghdad, Ispahan, Kabul. . . . And from the distant spots in which I shall find myself before long, Euskualleria, where I have been living for the past seven years, will seem like some peaceful, quiet land, reminiscent of shadows and tepid rainfalls, of beeches and ferns, and where so many venerable church bells are still heard tolling as evening approaches. . . .

We reach Saint-Jean-de-Luz just in time, for we have to hurry to catch the train. . . .

This eagerness to avoid being too late when one has to leave a place, these farewells, accom-

panied with the uncertainty of return, have made up the whole of my life ; they also represent the fevered lives of the majority of people nowadays, too short for what they would like to accomplish.

A NIGHT OF FEVER

24th December 1890.

THERE is a sort of intoxication which may have been caught long ago in the rice-fields of Indo-China, or even in the great swamps of Guinea and Senegal—a very strange condition of poisoning that lurks latent in one's inmost being, and returns every year or two, for a few hours, interfering considerably with the ordinary course of life.

Sailors who have spent some years in these lands are invariably acquainted with this singular malady which time cannot eradicate. It brings back the memory—one might almost say the *sight*—of certain regions of the earth in which there is an excess both of rain and sunshine.

No sooner does the fever begin than I see again, as though I were on the spot, endless green velvety stretche of rice-fields beneath a grey lowering sky, or dismal grassy plains on the confines of a Sahara, solitude, desolate

tracts on which grow mighty water-lilies that unfold their petals every evening at the hour of twilight.

It is about nightfall that this fever makes its appearance; at first the sensation is rather a pleasant one although the head is heavy and the temples burning. The mental life is momentarily doubled in intensity, and the field of imagination, aided by a strange drowsiness, extends indefinitely; the most extravagant projects seem easy to carry through; delightful and profound phrases are improvised—sometimes quite childishly insignificant if they return to mind on the morrow, though it may happen that the most entrancing strains of music are composed, melodies that call up a world of mystery and enchantment, but even then they split up into commonplace little songs when the attack is past. All through the succeeding night the head is racked with pain and feels as though confined with an iron band, whilst a terrible thirst comes over one. At last when dawn appears, the fever has almost always gone; there remains only a sense of lassitude—the painful stage caused by the pitiless lucidity that follows on the dreams of the night. The awakening is always accompanied by a dreary sort of clairvoyance, more particularly if it happens in the morning.

In this state of sudden weakness—which would make you think that life were ebbing away did you not know by experience that the weakness lasts but an hour, so fleeting, almost illusory is it—you have, in a way that has never before been experienced, the feeling that time is rapidly flying, and that all human effort is useless; there appears almost a physical sensation of the rapid, irresistible gliding away into death. . . .

* * * * *

This Christmas evening the fever has attacked me. Only this morning I left Paris, all alone, for my hermitage on the banks of the Bidassoa, as is my yearly custom, to attend a midnight mass to be given just across the river, in an old Capuchin convent.

It is very annoying that the fever should have chosen such a date and so I do all I can to resist it.

Stretched on a sofa by the fireside, in a small room on the ground floor, where December evenings are generally spent in these parts, I await the hour of midnight. My Basque servant is sitting up with me, reading some story of brigandage or smuggling.

The lonely house is wrapt in absolute silence. And yet, on winter evenings, you hear the dismal howling of the wind, for my windows,

overlooking the sea, are continually being lashed by squalls and showers of rain driven across the Bay of Biscay. However, this forms one of the charms of the spot: in the dark, moonless nights of the inclement season, when you feel somewhat isolated from the rest of the world by the little garden walks that have become all wet and black, it is delightful to listen to the gusts and shrieks of the hurricane outside.

This time there is silence all around; the breakers have ceased to wail and lament, and the branches of the trees in my garden, so often tossed about by the sea breezes, are now perfectly still. Outside it must be a beautiful Christmas night, clear and calm.

On the sofa to which the fever has confined me, as close to me as possible, lies Ratonne, my black-and-white tabby, asleep with her paws softly stretched out against my knees. Belaud, my grey tomcat, has begged to be excused, having business in the solitary gardens of the neighbourhood, where, I suppose, some midnight feline mass is being celebrated.

At last, in the peaceful garden, a male voice quartet is heard in joyous song of old-time rhythm, the beginning of those Christmas carols that are sung from door to door, and, as custom demands, my servant will have to offer

each of them cider or wine. I can hear it all in the semi-slumber of the fever, and along with the confused recollections of past Christmas-tides brought back by this music there mingles the insistent recollection of a dismal marsh in Senegal, when the giant moon is rising, and great lilies cover the surface of the water.

When these singers have gone others succeed them at short intervals, and these are followed by the piping treble voices of children.

"The little ones from the villages down by Subernoa," says my servant, who goes out each time to bring liquid refreshment for the new arrivals. "They have a *crèche* to exhibit, and a *Father Christmas* as well; if the commander permits, they might come inside. . . ."

"Very well, if they have so many fine things to show, tell them to come along; we must not give them offence."

The little procession has some difficulty in entering, scraping the wall, for what they are carrying is certainly cumbersome. They are six in number, of the same height, and about ten years of age; the leader marches in front with a lantern, four others carry on their shoulders a litter made of branches and containing the *crèche*, a little house of laurel twigs. The last one, the sixth, who takes the part of *Father Christmas*, is seated somewhat like a

little Buddha in this niche of verdure, and as a *Santa Claus* must always wear a beard of some sort, a pair of long moustaches have been traced on his childish face with a piece of burnt charcoal, and there, his cheeks all smutty, he sits enthroned and motionless in his green litter, rolling his bright, sparkling eyes from side to side. Their dignity and bearing is perfectly admirable, as they sing in a frankly falsetto voice, quite serious and all in perfect tune, accenting each word of the old song.

Evidently they have themselves cut down these branches from the neighbouring woods and put the whole thing together, in accordance with immemorial tradition. Then they have walked a distance of over two leagues, along mountain paths, with long staffs in their hand, which give them the appearance of little orang-outangs, or of quaint prehistoric beings. And, in spite of the smiles with which their visit is greeted, they leave behind the impression that something very ancient, something serious has just taken place. . . .

No sooner have they gone than we sink once again into profound silence. Shortly I hear a quarter-past ten strike from the church steeple of Fontarabia on the other side of the river. Thereupon my servant says to me:

"It is perhaps time I went for Ignacio and

Pantchiket,[1] for the commander promised that they should have some cakes to eat here before starting."

"Before starting! Well, I shall never have strength to attend this mass, for the fever is increasing, and my headache is growing worse. . . ."

Ignacio and Pantchiket now appear on the threshold, wearing *espadrilles* on their feet; they have entered noiselessly and with all the stealthy suppleness of a cat.

They remove their *bérets*, a concession to the good manners of my household, and then, because of the blazing wood crackling in the fireplace, beg to be permitted to remove their coats as well, a less elegant proceeding though far more in accord with the Basque character.

Ignacio and Pantchiket are two of my neighbours — famous smugglers, of course — whom I have requested to row me across to the Spanish shore to-night. They are now seated at the table, in woollen jerseys, in front of hot wine and a Christmas cake, which my servant is requested to share with them. Though greatly impressed at seeing me stretched on cushions, they begin a low-toned conversation, as at some death-vigil. Naturally their talk is all about smuggling, night

[1] A Basque corruption of François.

adventures in rain and storm. They also speak of myself for a short time, when they think I am fast asleep, and I am pleased to note that my servant makes the most of such qualities as I may possess, though, all the same, he deplores certain slight imperfections.

"For instance," he says, "in the matter of leaving his room in a state of disorder, any one would think that the commander embodied at least half a dozen persons in himself. . . ."

I am unable to follow the thread of their narratives, for my consciousness becomes more and more fixed on Africa and those interminable marshes swarming with grey alligators. A feeling of torpor keeps me on my back, in spite of my determination to rise and stir about; it seems as though death were gradually enfolding me in a warm embrace, whilst my freed spirit escapes its bonds of flesh . . . going off wherever my fancy dictates, above those regions of earth in which I have dwelt, and at times preferring to linger on deserts of slime and herbage resplendent in the torrid sun. . . . Really, I no longer know whether I am sleeping or awake.

In spite of all, I hear Ignacio telling me that it is a glorious moonlight night, that the fresh air will certainly cure me, and that it is time to start if we do not want to be late for

the mass. . . . No, no, my languid head lies motionless: I shall never be able to move, . . . never. . . .

I am now composing a marvellous oratorio on the Apocalypse. Suddenly, as an interpretation of *the last trump*, there enters my mind an inspiring chord which fills me with a mighty thrill, suggesting death and the end of all things. I admire myself for being so intuitive a musician, and determine to cultivate the gift. . . .

"Listen, Ignacio!" says Pantchiket. "You take nails, a hammer, and some string in your pocket. Then, when the train is in motion, the night train of course, you open the door and climb on to the top of the carriage with your smuggled goods. You arrange everything on the middle of the roof, and fasten it down firmly with your string and nails. Then you climb down and take your place in the carriage as innocent as a saint. . . . And who will discover the trick, pray? . . ."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Ignacio, "that is an old trick, they all know it. (*They* here refers to the custom-house officers of France and the carabineers of Spain, with whom, by the way, the smugglers are on very good terms, apart from the tricks they play them.) It's the same as hiding goods beneath the coal in

the tender . . ." continues Ignacio. "To think what we used to hide away there, when Itchoua was alive! . . . But they have got wind of it now; you see there is no possibility at all of smuggling anything through by train. . . ."

I must confess that this talk is rather commonplace, cutting discordantly into the oratorio I am composing. Still, all these things alternate, or rather are jumbled together, though without clashing with one another, in my fevered head: the smuggled goods, the spreading lilies of Senegal with their open petals on the surface of the languid waters, and finally the sombre valley of Jehoshaphat, the scene of my apocalyptic symphony. And I invent harmonies that appear altogether superhuman—accompaniments to the trump of the awe-inspiring archangel, the final lament of a world sinking back into chaos. . . .

Suddenly I hear bells, real bells this time: Christmas bells! The smugglers have ceased talking. The bells of Fontarabia in the distance are pealing out, and the night air seems filled with their clear silvery vibrations.

How delightful they sound! Never before have I heard so pure and musical a peal as that which reaches my ears this evening from across the slumbering river.

Well, since I am now wide awake, let me try to attend mass. It is not exactly what a doctor would advise me to do, in the height of a fever, to turn out in the fresh night air until about two in the morning. Never mind!

My head turns, and I feel quite giddy as I stand upright. Putting on a *béret*, my hair, which has become a thing insensitive, so to speak, seems as though it were standing on end, so painful is the contact with anything external. Never mind, come along!

My two boatmen were right: the night is a glorious one. The moon casts a deep blue light over all—the moon which the Basques call Il-argia (The Dead-Light)—and her pale splendour shines over sea and mountain. How much better to be out in the open air than stretched before a fire in a room that is too warm! What a delight merely to breathe! The air is exquisitely soothing, and there are gentle breezes from the South that remind one of a night in Africa. Often have I seen glorious Christmas nights in this Basque land, but never one like this — not the slightest sensation of cold or winter damp, nor even dew on the ground.

Ignacio's boat awaits us at the end of the garden, and we begin the fifteen minutes' crossing, or rather gliding, over a kind of starry

mirror, leaving behind a silvery moonlit furrow in our wake.

From the Spanish coast, stretching before us, all tinged with blue, come distant songs and the uncertain harmonies of a guitar. A momentary consciousness of ease, for which I may have to pay on my return, has succeeded the dull heaviness of the fever; I no longer see the marshes with their lily-covered surface, nor do I hear the melodious strains of the Apocalypse. But the bells of Fontarabia begin again, an eager, joyous, silver tinkling, at this usually silent hour, and air and water seem all vibrant with the sound. . . .

Oh! The Christmas nights and the Christmas bells! Is that infinitely sweet and almost ineffable witchery of theirs, which the flight of time cannot destroy, made up of nothing more than childhood's memories, or rather, is there not behind it all something occult, something eternal? . . .

A SUNDAY IN WINTER

January.

AGAIN, the Basque country, though I had already bidden farewell to it. I am staying here a few weeks longer, from sheer natural stubbornness in remaining wherever I have once lived, and a desire to keep a hold on all that is fleeting, to prolong everything that draws to a close.

Two o'clock in the afternoon, beneath the glow of a winter sun which actually in this southern clime resembles the sun in summer. Before the door of my humble abode my frolicsome young Tamboul, invariably the sole companion of my Sunday walks, awaits me with every sign of extreme impatience.

Where shall we go to-day, Tamboul? Not along the lonely mountain paths, beneath the shade of the mighty peaks. No, if you don't mind, we will go along the beach, towards the sea. . . .

Oh! How dull Sundays are! . . . When a

boy at school, I regarded them as most annoying, especially Sunday evenings, because they came to an end so soon, after I had longed for them the whole week. Now, whenever I happen to be in a town, they disgust me, doubtless on account of the stupid practice of wearing Sunday clothes, or because of the crowds of people and the silk hats everywhere to be seen on this day; out in the country they make me feel as sad as an exile, for the simple gaiety all around, even though it would be impossible for me to take part in it, has yet something about it that is vaguely attractive.

Though it is such a fine evening there is no one anywhere in sight on this splendid stretch of beach at the extreme end of the Bay of Biscay, and shut in by the brown cliffs of Spain. Before us, nothing but desert-like sand, and the blue, roaring ocean, without even a sail in sight. How sad it all is, so sad that I long to leave it. Let us retrace our steps and go somewhere else, for evidently I have become almost a native of the place, and I must confess I find greater pleasure — both Tamboul and myself find greater pleasure — on Sundays in keeping to the main roads, and simply looking at people's faces and dresses: the girls about here dress in such a droll, though frequently pretty fashion!

Where will there be most dancing to-day? I say *most*, for dancing will certainly be going on everywhere, as is always the case on Sundays. At Hendaya, Behobie, Behobia, Irun, or Fontarabia there is invariably music and dancing. Youths and maidens run from one to the other, crossing the frontier to and fro, hastening along so as to miss nothing. You see, my dear Tamboul, a famous writer—how sorry I am that I cannot tell you who he was! but, you know, I am not a great scholar; all the same, I think it was Voltaire—actually defined the Basques as a small nation who dance on the summits of the Pyrenees.

Well, then, let us get back at once and find out where there is to be music to-day.

At Hendaya the gay strains of a fandango are heard, not keeping perfectly correct time, by the way. Alas, on the French side of the frontier, fandangos have been danced less and less frequently during my seven years' sojourn here; mazurkas or quadrilles of no interest whatsoever have taken their place. The fanfare which greets our ears is a sign that this is the main centre of amusement, and so we had better cross over at once into Spain through crowds of little dancing girls who will shortly be hurrying along to the spot. . . . Ha! on the Hendaya square is a roundabout of wooden

horses, all that remains of last Sunday's festival. Tamboul, who has never before seen these things at such close quarters, is greatly excited and pricks up his ears. . . . "After all," he says to himself, "since there are so many people about, all this cannot be very dangerous. Why not take the whole matter gaily?" And he passes along in very lively spirits, keeping time with the music — a waltz tune played on a barrel-organ.

Another occasion for excitement! We reach the railway bridge just as the three o'clock train flies past: Tamboul does not conceal the sense of amazement that comes over him at the approach of the train.

Now we are on the road leading to Behobie and Behobia, the two halves, French and Spanish, of one and the same village, joined together by an international bridge over the Bidassoa.

To-day the road is charming, beneath the fine wintry sun, though in a pitiable state and all broken up. It rises and descends, following the valley of the Bidassoa on the French coast. Fresh spring colours are already to be seen on the hedges by the wayside, whilst above the garden walls the last few January roses are still in bloom. On the other side of the mirror-surfaced river, and quite close to us, rise the

lofty peaks of the Spanish Pyrenees, on which dainty phantasmagoric figures are formed by great curtains of mist and cloud.

This is the very spot for the purpose, and all the young people around are hastening towards Hendaya, in eager, joyous groups. Here are troops of young men, wearing *bérets*, their general appearance suggesting an air of conquest; the most peasant-like amongst them carrying their coats on their shoulders. Troups of girls as well, all decked out in their finery and so pleasing to behold! Many of them are pretty, and almost all are graceful, with their uncovered heads and dainty *coiffures*. Moreover, they seem quite different from our peasant girls in other French provinces, for they are extremely elegant in dress, gait, and figure, and wear the very newest and choicest robes and the most becoming mantillas. Though so near to the frontier where one would expect all to be alike, the Spanish Basque maidens have darker-hued cheeks and a more languid air than the French.

Mon Dieu, my dear Tamboul, what a number of people I know here! You see, when I arrived in these parts you were not born, a short eternity of seven years ago.

Seven years! That is why so many hands are raised to their *bérets* as I pass along. Nor

need you wonder, Tamboul, if a few pretty *chignons*—which had scarcely received my attention at all when first I knew the little girls whose heads they now grace—bow daintily, whilst young lips say with a smile, "Adios!" or "Bonjour, Monsieur Loti!"

Here is Behobie, and the international bridge is guarded on this side by French custom-house officers who give me the military salute. At the other end are the fierce carabineers who bar our passage, but their sergeant recognizes me and says to his men, "*Es el commandante*," with a friendly wave of the hand intimating that I may pass.

There will be but little dancing at Behobia to-day; Hendaya is proving too powerful a rival. Before the inn at the corner an accordion is playing dance music for a score of girls, probably farm servants, who face each other, two by two, with arms raised, cracking their fingers as though they were castanets.

They offer no interest to us, Tamboul, as they are all ill-favoured. We will go on to Irun, another three kilometres; there we shall certainly find something better.

Off starts Tamboul once more, ever ready to go in front, both head and tail erect, for he is conscious of being a handsome animal and

an object of general admiration. Along the Bidassoa, on the Spanish bank this time, we follow, in the opposite direction, almost the identical road along which we journeyed an hour ago.

At the entrance to Irun is a homely-looking woman roasting chestnuts, to the great dismay of Tamboul, for she is encircled by a dense cloud of smoke. Then we come to a square, in which stand groups of young men wearing red Carlist *bérets*. From there we pass close along an immense wall on the other side of which we hear the sharp *clac! clac!* of a ball.

Don't be uneasy, Tamboul, this is no more dangerous than the chestnut-woman's stove; for it is the wall against which a game of *pelota* is being played. . . . (I really believe I forgot, at the outset, to say that Tamboul was my horse; I hope, however, my readers have guessed this before now.)

There is no one to-day in the streets of this little town of Irun, which, being so near the frontier, has all the appearance and even the odour of a Spanish town. Consequently all the daintily-dressed women will naturally be away; another couple of kilometres, Tamboul, and we shall reach Fontarabia.

Outside the town, and once more on the road, we find crowds of people going to the "old

heroic city," either themselves to dance or to watch the dancing. Daintily-plumed hats, a few mantillas, or, it may be, ordinary *coiffures* with the most delightful wavy effects, and striking dresses everywhere are visible. Besides, there is perceptibly a greater degree of luxury in Spain than in our own country; form and style may be more novel and eccentric perhaps, and colours are somewhat unexpected or even loud, but the *ensemble*, the general effect, is charming and attractive. . . .

Here are three women dressed most elegantly and wearing altogether sensational hats; they walk along, arm in arm, in the drollest manner imaginable, pretending not to be taking each other seriously, but rather giving one the impression that they are perpetrating some huge joke. One of them, hearing Tamboul's trot-trot, turns round and smiles at me, then she attracts the attention of the others, who also turn round and smile. Actually I had not recognized them, so gay in their feathers and flowers! "Bonjour, Conchita; bonjour, Gracieuse; bonjour, Marie-Louise!" Three little smugglers from France who have crossed over into Spain in these astounding dresses, though shortly they will take them off and return bareheaded by another road, in short skirts, just as dainty and pretty as

before. Then, however, they will be walking more quickly so as not to catch cold.

After this long journey we finally reach the "Alameda" of Fontarabia and find ourselves over against Hendaya, our starting-point, on the opposite bank: Hendaya and Fontarabia, so short a distance from each other if one crosses the Bidassoa, are a considerable distance apart if one journeys by road.

The "Alameda," the promenade, where, of course, the dancing takes place, is distinct from and at the foot of the sombre old town, standing aloft there, within its ancient ramparts. There are two bands which play one after the other, a brass band and a fife and tambourine band. It is the fandango, nothing but the fandango, that they dance all the time. Hundreds of hands wave in the air, in imitation of castanets, and the girls turn in and out, with the most graceful body movements. . . .

"My dear master," says Tamboul (my cats and horses have always been the only persons who do not make me smile when they address me as "dear master"), since you never dance, and I know you dread that sense of gloom which comes over you at twilight, perhaps it is time to . . ."

A very wise remark; come along!

As daylight is declining, and the mountain

shadows are drawing in upon us, we will retrace our steps along the same route—Irun, Behobia, Behobie, Hendaya.

Hendaya : I'm afraid we shall have to hurry along here, Tamboul, and cross the railway bridge before the express from Madrid to Paris dashes past ; such an event might prove too exciting for you. . . .

* * * * *

At last we are back in my solitary abode, as the January twilight comes creeping over the land. It is already dark beneath the trees in the garden. No more music, but a vast silence ; in the distance, however, the never-ceasing plaint of the breakers in the Bay of Biscay may be heard. Suddenly there steals over me that sadness peculiar to a Sunday evening, descending like a shroud upon my very soul.

The only one of my men who, unfortunately for himself, is on duty to-day, after lighting my fire, comes up and addresses me somewhat in these terms :

" Perhaps the commander would permit me to return to the music until supper-time ? I am certain no one will come this evening, for there are never any beggars on Sundays."

" You want to return to the music, eh ? Well, I quite understand ; off you go, *mon ami.*

You will see the supple form of some young maiden keeping time with the fandango, if that is what you dance, or you will feel it languidly supported by your arm, if you prefer to waltz. . . . For my part, I think I will try to amuse myself by jotting down my impressions of the day's happenings. . . . Still, I must confess I would rather be only twenty-two years of age like you, without troubling myself as to whether my uniform were quite correct or not. . . . I, too, would rather go off to the dance!

EASTER ISLAND

In the middle of the Great Ocean, far from the ordinary routes of navigation, is a lonely, mysterious island; there is no other land near, and for more than eight hundred leagues in every direction stretches a restless waste of waters. All over the island stand high and monstrous statues, the work of a degenerate race that has now disappeared. Its history remains an enigma, buried in the mists of time.

In my early youth I once landed on this spot, in a sailing cruiser, after a very rough voyage. The sky was continually overcast with dark clouds, the memory left in my mind being that of some fantastic dreamland.

My notebook, during the time I was a naval cadet, contains my impressions written down day by day, in more or less boyish and incoherent fashion.

It is this boy's diary that I have here transcribed, doing my best to give it such precision as it lacked.

DIARY OF A CADET ON BOARD THE "FLORE"

For Albert Vandal

I

3rd January 1872.

AT eight in the morning the look-out man signals that land is in sight, and the dim outline of Easter Island may be discerned away in the direction of the north-west. The distance is still great, and we are unable to land before evening, in spite of the speed at which the trade winds drive us along.

In order to reach this spot we left the ordinary routes followed by vessels crossing the Pacific several days ago, for Easter Island is a long way from any track. It was discovered by chance, and the few navigators who have visited it from time to time have given the most contradictory accounts of the place. The population, whose origin, by the way, is wrapt in mystery, is gradually dying out for reasons which no one knows, and there remain —so we have been informed—no more than a few dozen savages, timorous and famished, who feed on roots; standing alone in these watery solitudes, the island itself will soon be no more than a solitude also with gigantic statues as its sole guardians. There is nothing

to be found there, not even a supply of fresh water; besides, more frequently than not, landing is impossible by reason of the breakers and numberless hidden rocks.

We are going to this place for the purpose of exploring it, and, if possible, bringing away one of these ancient stone statues, which our admiral would like to take back to France.

Slowly we draw nearer and nearer to the strange island until, beneath the cloud-laden sky, its sombre rocks and ruddy craters come in sight. A strong wind is blowing, covering the sea with a sheet of white foam.

Rapa-Nui is the name given by the natives to Easter Island—the very sound of the word seems expressive of a mingled sadness, gloom, and night . . . *nuit*. The night of time, the night of the world's beginnings, or the night of the heavens, it is impossible to say which; but certainly these black clouds, darkening the entire place, correspond exactly to my expectations, to what my imagination had pictured.

Finally, at four in the afternoon, sheltered by the island, we furl sail and cast anchor in the bay which Captain Cook entered years ago. Then canoes put out from the strange-looking shore and make their way towards us, in the teeth of a howling wind.

* * * * *

Here comes a kind of whale-boat, carrying some one who looks like a European! . . . A man wearing a hat and coat, coming from Rapa-Nui—such a spectacle upsets all my previous notions and disillusions me considerably.

Our visitor comes on board: he is an old Dane, a most unexpected individual.

Three years ago, he tells us, a schooner from Tahiti, engaged in carrying pearls and mother-of-pearl to America, made a detour of two hundred leagues for the purpose of landing him here. Ever since then the old adventurer has been living alone with the natives, as completely separated from our world as though he had fixed his abode in the moon. An American planter had sent him to plant yams and Spanish potatoes in the island, in order to acclimatize them and pave the way for immense plantations in future years; but nothing will grow, and the savages refuse to work. There are still three or four hundred of them, says the old man, all grouped near the bay in which we have cast anchor, whilst the rest of the country has become almost or entirely a desert. The Dane himself lives in a stone house which he found on his arrival. He was compelled to build a fresh roof to this dwelling, which had formerly been inhabited by French mission-

aries—there were actually missionaries at Rapa-Nui for a number of years—but they had either left the place, or had died, leaving the natives to return to their fetiches and idols.

Whilst he is speaking to us, I hear behind me a faint sound as of some one leaping; turning round to see who it is, I find that one of the oarsmen, a young savage, has ventured to climb on to the deck. What an amazingly thin face he has, with slight aquiline nose and large sad eyes! He is quite nude and very slender, all muscle and sinew, his copper-coloured skin is tattooed a delicate blue, and his hair, which is also of a ruddy tint, is tied up with scabious stalks on the top of his head, forming a sort of tuft or top-knot, which resembles a flame as it is tossed about by the wind. With a terrified expression in his wide-open eyes, he stares at us. There is the charm of a devilkin or a " farfadet " about his whole person.

" And what of the statues ? " we ask the old Robinson Crusoe.

Ah! the statues? It appears there are two kinds: those on the beach, all overturned and broken—we shall find some near this very bay—and others that are dreadful to behold, with another type of face and belonging to a different period. The latter are still standing

over on the other side of the island, in a lonely part which no one ever visits.

The red-tufted savage is growing more sociable; to please us, he begins to sing and dance. He is one of those who were baptized by the missionaries some years previously, and his name is Petero. His hair is all dishevelled, and the strains of his melancholy song are carried away by the howling wind which increases as night draws near.

The others are timid and unwilling to come on to the deck. All the same, we are surrounded by their canoes, which continually dance about on the surface of the water, and are covered with spray and foam. Pointing to their nude limbs, they make signs that the sailors should give them clothes in exchange for their paddles, their lances, and their idols of wood or stone. The whole tribe has come to meet us, innocently excited by our presence. In the bay the sea is now very rough, and night puts an end to the scene.

II

4th January.

It is five in the morning, and day is beginning to dawn beneath dense grey clouds. A whale-boat with which I have been entrusted carries

me off in the direction of the still dismal-looking shore, accompanied by two other cadets, friends of mine, who are as eager to set foot on the strange island as I am myself. The admiral, amused by the zeal we show, has given each of us a different commission : one has to reconnoitre the channel and find a good place for landing, another to locate the large statues, and the third to shoot a rabbit or two for his lunch !

It is dull and cold. We have the wind beating upon us, a violent trade wind dashing sheets of salt foam in our faces. The island assumes its most fantastic aspect for our reception ; over against the dark grey sky, its rocks and craters wear a pale yellow look. Nor is there a tree to be seen : a desolate wilderness on every side.

We have little difficulty in finding the channel in the midst of the breakers, which dash and foam unceasingly. After passing the girdle of reefs and ridges, we sail into calm water, and soon come upon Petero, perched on a rock and calling out to us. His cries arouse the entire tribe, and, in a moment, the beach is covered with savages. They come from everywhere ; from the hollows of rocks in which they have been sleeping, and from huts so low that it seems impossible for human beings to inhabit

such places. From the distance we had not noticed these thatched huts, though we now see that there are quite a number of them, scarce raised above, and of the same colour as the ground.

No sooner have we landed on the spot indicated by Petero than all these men surround us. In the early morning semi-darkness some brandish their flint-pointed lances and their paddles, others raise aloft their old idols. The cold wind roars and rages with redoubled violence, and the low-lying clouds seem almost to be sweeping the very ground.

The whale-boat from which we landed is now, by order of the commander, rowed back to the schooner. My two comrades, who carry firearms, start along the shore in the direction of a rabbit warren mentioned by the Dane the previous evening, and I am left alone, my new hosts drawing in upon me more and more closely. Their chests and faces are all blue with tattoo-marks, they have long hair and sad-looking eyes, though they smile on me and show their white teeth. In my light garments, all damp with sea spray, I shiver with cold. Daylight seems very slow in making its appearance through the heavy sky. . . . The circle of savages around me has now closed in on all sides, and each of them offers me either his

lance or his idol. Then they begin to sing, at first quite softly, a sort of dismal, plaintive melopoeia, accompanied by a swinging, balanced movement of head and body, somewhat like great bears standing on their hind legs. . . . I know they are harmless, and really their faces are childlike in their gentleness, though at a first glance the tattoo-marks give them quite a ferocious aspect. There is not the slightest reason why I should be afraid of them; all the same, as this is the first time in my life that I am alone under such conditions, a shudder of surprise and instinctive dread comes over me at the close proximity of all these eyes and breaths, in the early morning, on so desolate a shore. . . .

And now the rhythm of the song becomes quicker, as also the movement of head and body; the voices are hoarse and deep, and amid the roar of the sea and the raging elements they evolve into a great savage cry, the prelude to a furious dance.

Suddenly they become quiet; all is over. The circle is broken and the dancers disperse. . . . What did they want with me? Was it some childish sport, or an incantation, or were they merely bidding me welcome? . . . Who can tell? . . .

* * * * *

A tattooed old man with long black feathers in his hair, some chief doubtless, now takes me by one hand whilst Petero seizes hold of the other; they drag me along at a run, with all the rest following.

We come to a halt before one of the thatched dwellings all around, on rock and sand, reminding one of the back of some huge crouching beast.

They invite me to enter, which I am compelled to do on all-fours, winding my way in, after the fashion of a cat; for the door, close to the ground and guarded by two sinister-looking granite gods, consists of a round hole, scarcely two feet in diameter.

Inside, I can see nothing, chiefly on account of the natives who crowd in and render the place darker than it would otherwise be; of course it is impossible to stand upright, and, after the fresh air without, I find it difficult to breathe, in the odour emanating from such a den.

I am invited to seat myself on a mat, by the side of the chieftainess and her daughter; they have nothing to offer me as a present, and consequently beg to be excused for their lack of hospitality, so I understand, at all events, from their moans and gestures. My eyes have by this time become more accustomed to the

place, which I find swarming with cats and rabbits.

During the course of the morning, I am compelled to pay many other visits of the same kind, in order to satisfy the principal inhabitants of the island. I glide into quite a number of sombre-looking abodes, followed invariably by the rest of the company, enclosing me in a jumble of chests and limbs, all bare and tattooed, until gradually I become permeated with all the odours emanating from such a state of things.

They are all disposed to give me idols, clubs, or lances, in exchange for wearing apparel or anything else that takes their fancy. Money, of course, is meaningless to them: at the best, silver coins might be used to form a necklace, though glass beads have a far more beautiful effect.

At last it is clear daylight, and the curtain of clouds is rent asunder in all directions. Now, everything looks different; the island is more *real* and less repellent; besides, I am growing accustomed to it.

I have already bargained away the entire contents of my pockets; my handkerchief, a box of matches, a notebook and pencil. Finally, I determine to part with my cadet's coat in exchange for an extraordinary club, terminat-

ing in a sort of two-faced Janus head, and, for the rest of the time, I find myself in shirt sleeves.

Assuredly, I have fallen amongst a nation of children ; neither young nor old seem to tire of listening to me, gazing at and following me everywhere ; they carry my various acquisitions, idols and weapons, chanting a plaintive melopoeia all the time. Just imagine what an event our presence in this lonely island must be, for on an average they do not see a sail on this vast stretch of waters once in ten years.

Distinct from the rest, who remain a certain distance behind me, are special friends I have made, five in number : first of all, Petero, then two boys, Atamou and Houga, and finally two girls, Marie and Iouaritaï.

Both girls are nude with the exception of a girdle round the loins ; their bodies would be almost white but for exposure to sun and sea, and that slight copper tint which distinguishes the race. Their limbs and sides are tattooed with strange and exquisite designs, doubtless for the purpose of emphasizing their charming slimness. Marie, a child baptized by the missionaries—such a name as Marie for a daughter of Easter Island is somewhat disconcerting—has only her Juno-like figure, her clear complexion, and her teeth to recommend her. Iouaritaï, however, would be pretty in

any country, with her dainty little nose and large timorous eyes; she has her hair tied up in antique fashion; it has been artificially coloured red and is adorned with blades of grass.

Mon Dieu! How time passes! . . . It is already half-past ten, the hour appointed for our return on board for lunch, and I see in the distance, making its way through the reefs, the whale-boat coming to take us back. My two comrades have returned from the chase, and, like myself, are followed by a body of natives, singing. They have killed several ivory gulls —which they distribute to the women—but not a single rabbit. What terrible youths we are to send on a commission! I have actually forgotten all about the large statues I was charged to go and find. . . .

* * * * *

On board we are well received all the same, and the officers are interested in all I have to report.

I can scarcely contain myself, however, and as soon as it is noon, return to my savage friends.

The wind is still blowing strongly, though this must be a frequent occurrence on Easter Island, situated as it is in a region where the southern trade wind is most violent. All the

same, the sky shows only a few straggling shreds of the sombre veil that covered it this morning, and in the blue vault overhead appears the burning sun, for here we are close to the tropics.

On arriving at the beach I notice that it is the hour of the noon-day siesta, and my five friends, who are seated there on stones, politely awaiting me, look very drowsy.

I, too, should be glad to close my eyes for a few minutes; but then, where can any shade be found to protect the head, in this island, utterly destitute of a single tree . . . even of a bush?

After a few moments' reflection I decide upon requesting the old chief to grant me a little shelter, and, crawling along on all-fours, I worm my way into his hut.

The hut is very warm, and the ground is covered with extended human forms. Beneath this carapace, which has about the capacity of an overturned canoe, lives the chief with his family: wife, two sons, daughter, son-in-law and grandson, to say nothing of rabbits and poultry, and, finally, seven ill-favoured cats, all lean and lanky, with several kittens.

However, they instal me on a carpet of plaited reeds, and, in a spirit of deference, noiselessly depart, one by one, to sleep some-

where else; whilst I remain in the care of Atamou, who fans me with a black-plumed fly-flap. In a few moments I am asleep.

Half an hour afterwards, on regaining consciousness of my surroundings, I find myself completely alone. The silence is broken only by the distant murmur of the waves as they dash on to the coral reefs, or by an occasional gust which shakes the reeds on the roof of the hut. My first impression, on waking, is a sense of being extremely far away from my own land, abandoned and lost. There also comes over me a sort of *island oppression*, a unique feeling of anguish like none other in intensity: the immense stretch of Southern seas all around suddenly filling me with a sense of unrest that is almost physical.

From the dark corner where I am lying I can see a brilliant sunbeam shining through the hole which takes the place of a door; on the floor of the hut it casts the shadow of an idol guarding the entrance, and also those of a couple of absurd-looking cats, with excessively long ears, sitting there and dreamily gazing outside. . . . Even about this trail of light and its dull brilliancy there seems something strange, something far far away, infinitely long ago. In all this sunlight and silence and beneath this tropical wind there comes over

me a feeling of indescribable sadness, a sadness belonging to the early ages of humanity, it may be, and which, in some dim fashion, seems to be connected with the very soil, which just now is being actually baked by the same eternal sun. . . .

Naturally, on fully regaining consciousness, all this quickly passes away and is forgotten, like a child's idle whim. Without moving, I amuse myself by examining the place in detail, whilst a number of mice, in spite of the two cats standing sentinel at the door, quietly scamper about by my side.

The reed roof that shelters me is supported on ribs of palm-trees—but then, where can these have been obtained, as no trees grow on the island and there is scarcely any other vegetation than ordinary grass and shrubs? . . . In this habitation, which is less than five feet high and about a dozen feet in length, innumerable objects are carefully hung up: small idols of black wood, swaddled up in esparto grass, lances with chipped flint points, human-faced paddles, plumed *coiffures*, ornaments connected with dancing and fighting, and many utensils of the most terrifying aspect, with whose use I am totally unacquainted though they all appear extremely old. Our ancestors long ago, in the early ages of the

world, when they found courage to issue from their holes and caves, must have constructed huts of this kind, adorned with objects of a similar nature; here you feel yourself surrounded by an infinitely primitive human race, one that is twenty or thirty thousand years younger than our own.

When one thinks of it, however, how old is this dried wood of which their clubs and their gods are made? . . . And how have the cats and rabbits come here? . . . Perhaps the missionaries brought the latter; but surely no one can have brought the mice that scamper about in the huts! . . . Where do they come from, then? The slightest things in this lonely island arouse questions to which no reply can be given; one is altogether astonished to find that a flora and a fauna exist at all here.

* * * * *

The human inhabitants of Easter Island came from the Occident, from the Polynesian Archipelago: of that there can be no question.

In the first place, they say so themselves. Tradition states that, centuries ago, they left the most eastern island of the ocean, Rapa, which is still called by that name. It was in memory of this distant land of theirs that they named their new home: Rapa-Nui (the Great Rapa).

This origin being admitted, their exodus and journeyings are still enveloped in mystery. Indeed, the southern region of the Great Ocean, included between America and Oceania, is alone far wider than the Atlantic Ocean; it represents the vastest and most terribly deserted watery waste on the surface of our globe — and in the centre is Easter Island, small and lonely, of no more account than a pebble in the midst of a sea. Besides, the winds in this region do not blow from all parts of the sky, as in our own lands, but rather from one constant direction, and thus they are bound to be invariably contrary, in the case of ships coming from Polynesia. On mere canoes, then, after how many months of obstinate tacking about, with what provisions, and guided by what inexplicable instinct, did these mysterious navigators succeed in reaching this grain of sand, lost in such an immensity? [1] Besides, ever since they first came, they seem to have lost all means of communication with the rest of the world.

But beyond doubt these people are Polynesians, *Maoris*. They have become only a little paler than their ancestors, because of

[1] According to the tradition of the Maoris and their ancestral genealogies, their arrival on Easter Island dates back no more than a thousand years.—P. L.

the cloud-covered skies, but have retained their fine stature and handsome characteristic features, the rather long oval face and large eyes so close together. Besides, they have retained several of the customs of their distant brethren; above all, they speak the same language.

I regard it as one of the unexpected charms of this island that the Maori language is spoken here, for I began to study it in missionary books, in view of our coming voyage to "Tahiti la délicieuse," of which I had dreamed ever since childhood. And here, for the first time in my life, I recognize some of those words which still sound so new, so melodiously barbaric, to my ears.

* * * * *

'I do not intend to forget the great statues as I did this morning. My noonday siesta over, I ask Atamou, the first person I see, in his own language:

"Will you please conduct me to the Tombs?"

He understands me perfectly.

I used the word *sépultures* (in Tahitian, *maraé*, and in the language of Easter Island, *maraï*) because the huge stones that form the purpose of our voyage mark the places where great chiefs, fallen in battle, lie buried, beneath stones piled up in mounds. The name *maraï*

is also given by the natives to the innumerable fetiches and idols that fill their reed-constructed huts, and which, to their mind, are connected with the memory of the dead.

Atamou and I, then, set off alone, as it happens, without our usual following this time, to visit the nearest *máraï*. This is my first expedition in this unexplored island.

Proceeding along the sea-shore for a short distance, we cross a plain covered by a rough and quite unique kind of grass, all dull and faded-looking.

On our way we find the ruins of a small dwelling, similar to that inhabited by the Dane. Atamou tells me that this is the house of a *papa farani* (French father, missionary) and stops to relate, in this connection, and with many signs, a doubtless very exciting story, though I cannot well catch its drift. I divine from his gestures, however, that there were men hidden behind stones, lying in wait, and that a fight took place, with muskets and lances as weapons. . . . What did they do to the poor priest ? . . . One never knows what degree of sudden ferocity may be reached by a savage, ordinarily gentle and bland, when spurred to action by primitive passion or gloomy superstition. Nor must it be forgotten that the cannibal instinct is slumbering deep

within these Polynesian natures, apparently so accommodating and easy-going: for instance, in Oceania, in the islands of Routouma and Hivaoa, Maoris who are anything but repulsive to look at will, as occasion offers, eat human flesh.

His story ended, Atamou, convinced that I have thoroughly understood him, takes me by the hand and we continue our route.

In front of us stands a mound of brown stones, after the style of the Gallic cromlechs, though formed of larger blocks; on one side it overlooks the sea; on the other it faces the gloomy deserted plain, bounded in the distance by extinct craters. Atamou assures me that this is the *maraï* and we both mount on to these stones.

It is a sort of cyclopean daïs, half concealed by the sinking of large, irregular and defaced columns. I inquire about the statues, however, as I can see them nowhere—whereupon Atamou calmly invites me to look underfoot. . . . I was perched on the chin of one of them, which, lying on its back, was fixedly gazing upon me from below, through the two holes that served for eyes. I had not imagined it to be so large and shapeless, and so had not noticed its presence. . . . As a matter of fact, about a dozen of them are lying half broken

all over the place; some final volcanic shock has doubtless overthrown them. The crash of the fall must have been a terrible one. The face is carved with childish lack of experience; rudiments of arms and hands are barely hinted at all down the sides of the rotund body, and this gives them a resemblance to stubby pillars. A certain religious awe, however, might readily be inspired by them when upright, erect and colossal, facing that limitless waste of waters. Atamou informs me that there are many others in a distant part of the island, representing a whole tribe who lie dead along the coral-whitened beach.

At the feet of the *maraï* is a small circular beach on to which we descend. It is surrounded by rocks. The crumbling away by the sea of all kinds of corals has supplied it with a sand of snowy whiteness dotted with dainty little shells and fine grains of pink coral.

The trade wind blows with increasing violence as the day advances. Again it brings with it, from the far solitudes of the Southern sea, a whole mass of black clouds, so black that the old mountains and extinct volcanoes begin to stand out distinctly against the sky, which has suddenly become dark. Atamou, who foresees a coming storm, hastens our return.

As a matter of fact, when we are half-way back, we are overtaken by a rapid downpour, whilst furious gusts of wind lay flat the whole stretch of grass along the plain. We halt for shelter beneath overhanging rocks—in the midst of a swarm of red dragon-flies. . . . Where can they have come from? And what of the butterflies we have seen flitting above these grassy carpets, white and yellow butterflies, how can their eggs have been transported here across eight hundred leagues of ocean? . . .

These sombre-hued clouds quickly disappear to continue their course across the watery desert, after bedewing the mysterious island as they pass. On returning to the bay where our schooner lies anchored, the evening sun is shining.

All about the shore on which are grouped the reed-constructed houses, an unwonted aspect of life and gaiety is manifest, for all the officers on board have come for a stroll this afternoon; each escorted by a small band of natives. Now that the hour for their return is drawing nigh, they are sitting there on the ground surrounded by these great primitive children, who have been their friends all afternoon and are now singing in order to enhance the enjoyment of their guests. On my return,

I take my place with them, and immediately my own particular friends come running up, Petero, Houga, Marie and the pretty Iouaritaï. Though we have been here only a few hours our presence has already introduced an element of ridicule and masquerade, alas, into this desolate and wild country. In return for fetiches and weapons, we have almost all exchanged old garments of every sort, with which the men, whose breasts are all tattooed, have childishly covered themselves. Most of the women, either from show or from a notion of decorum, have put on poor shapeless dresses made of calico which has lost all its colour. Years ago these must have been offered to their mothers by the mission priests, and doubtless they have long been lying unused in the thatched huts.

The Maoris are singing, beating their hands in rhythmic dance time. The women utter notes as sweet and flute-like as a bird's. At times the men sing in a thin, quavering falsetto voice, then again they give forth cavernous sounds like the roar of a prowling wild beast. Their music consists of short, jerky phrases, ending in doleful descending notes in a minor key; one would say that they wished to express the wonder and sorrow of life, and yet they join in song because of

their childish joy at seeing us, because they are pleased with the novel trifles we have brought them.

An ephemeral joy, which, to-morrow, when we are far away, will be followed by prolonged monotony and silence. Prisoners on their treeless and waterless island, these savage singers belong to a condemned race, which, even in the mother islands of Polynesia, is quickly becoming extinct; they belong to a humanity destined to disappear before long.

Whilst some clap their hands and amuse themselves, mingling with us freely, others watch us in pensive quiet. Upon a semi-circle of rocks, above us and facing the sea, lives another part of the population, more timid and mistrustful, with whom we have been unable to make friends: men tattooed all over, crouching in fierce attitudes, their hands clasped under their knees, women seated on the ground, motionless as statues, with a kind of white mantle on their shoulders and reed crowns on their hair which is tied up in antique fashion. They utter not the slightest sound, but merely look at us from a distance. And when, at sunset, we depart in our boats, the golden orb, just dipping into the sea, floods them with its red rays, through an opening in the newly-formed clouds, lighting up the

silent groups and the rock on which they are seated, outlined against the dark sky and the brown craters. . . .

* * * * *

On board that evening, as I am on duty for the night, I run through certain documents in the possession of our admiral that deal with Easter Island ever since the time when it was discovered by "civilized" men. "I note, though without surprise, that it is civilized men who have proved themselves most ignobly savage in their dealings with savages.

About 1850, indeed, a band of Peruvian colonists decided to send ships to the island and carry off the inhabitants as slaves. The Maoris defended themselves as well as they could with lances and stones against the guns of their aggressors; they were defeated, of course, and slain in great numbers; hundreds of them, shamelessly captured, were compelled to depart for a life of slavery to Peru. After a few years, however, the governor of Lima sent back such as had not died of home-sickness and the cruelty to which they had been subjected. The exiles, however, on returning to their dwellings, were suffering from smallpox, and over half the population perished from this new disease, for which the sorcerers of the island could find no remedy.

III

5th January.

To-day again, one of my comrades and myself have obtained a boat from the commander and off we start at dawn for the island. It is stormy once more, and we have the trade wind straight in our face, delaying our course and drenching us with spray from head to foot. Not without difficulty do we reach the shore, for we somewhat lose our way amid the coral reefs all covered with white foam.

Atamou and our friends run up to welcome us, along with some savages I have not seen before; from one of these latter I obtain an iron-wood god, with gloomy, fierce-looking face and hair adorned with black plumes.

It is the first time that my comrade has landed, and so he requests me to take him at once to see the ancient *marai*, from which we intend to remove a statue to-day. Troups of natives follow us through the wet grassy plain. Reaching the spot, they begin to dance on the tombstones and reclining idols, like a legion of "farfadets," their hair tossed about by the howling wind. They are nude and ruddy, their slender light bodies standing out distinctly against the brown stones and the black horizon, as they dance on the enormous stone faces,

their toes noiselessly knocking against the brows, noses and cheeks of the giants. Nor is it possible to hear what they are singing, through the ever-increasing roar of squall and rain. . . .

The men of Rapa-Nui, who show such veneration for little fetiches and tiny gods, all seem utterly lacking in respect for these tombs; they have quite forgotten the dead who lie buried beneath them.[1]

* * * * *

We afterwards return to our own familiar bay, where stand the reed-built huts, and here I begin to move about in less ceremonious fashion than yesterday, accompanied by only a few of my intimate friends, for I am becoming one of the inhabitants of the place. Men whom I meet simply touch my hand or give me a friendly sign, and then continue their way.

"*Ia ora na, taio!*" (Good-day, friend!) say the chieftainess and her daughter—who are in a field digging up Spanish potatoes—

[1] The accepted opinion is that the statues of Easter Island were not made by the Maoris, but are the work of a former race now unknown and extinct. This may be true as regards the large statues of Ranoraraku, of which I shall speak shortly. But the innumerable statues which once covered the *marai* on the sea-shore do really belong to the Maori race, and in all probability represent the Spirit of the Sands and the Spirit of the Rocks.—P. L.

without interrupting their work. The old chief receives me in a cavern close to his dwelling, where he spends his days crouching on the ground, his hands clasped beneath his tattooed knees. But for the extremely gentle expression of his eyes he would be terrible to behold, with his dark blue striped face, his long hair, his projecting teeth and this habit of assuming the immobility of an animal. As I no longer appear to be of any particular interest to him I cut short my visit.

Anxious to take away one of those black-plumed *coiffures*, about a yard wide, such as I have seen on the heads of some old persons who appear difficult of access, I mention the matter to Houga, who understands my hesitating sentences better than the rest, and together we begin our investigations. He takes me into several huts, where I find, crouching on the ground, old men with blue faces and white teeth, motionless as mummies and seemingly indifferent to my presence; one of them, however, is busy extracting teeth from a human jaw with the object of supplying his idol with white eyes. Hanging from the roof are great garlands of feathers; but the old men ask a ridiculous price for them, my white cloth trousers and my cadet's coat, with its gold lace ornaments—quite a new one, for I sold the

old one yesterday. It is too much, I cannot entertain the purchase. Houga, seeing that I am disappointed, undertakes to repair a rather old one of his own, just a trifle worn, and give it to me in exchange for a pair of trousers only —an offer which I accept.

And now for the visit—promised yesterday —to our old Danish Robinson Crusoe.

The very entrance of his tiny house is heart-rending, with its apology for a verandah and a little garden in which a few scanty plants—the seeds of which he must have brought with him—are growing. What an exile for a man who, in this desolate place, has not even a clump of trees or a patch of verdure whereon to rest his eyes. And if pain, sickness or death were to befall him, there is no possibility of communicating with the rest of the world. . . .

"He went off at dawn to hunt rabbits," graciously explains his morganatic spouse, who begs us to enter all the same. She is a middle-aged and somewhat faded-looking Maori, and, of course, the lady of the island. This morning she is wearing a yellow muslin tunic and a red woollen travelling rug thrown over her shoulders like a shawl. She offers us fresh clear water obtained from a goglet, a precious gift, for there are no springs at

Rapa-Nui; the natives collect water when it rains, and keep it in gourds, where it quickly becomes tainted, or else they obtain it from the bottom of craters, though the pools are frequently dried up. How desolate and sad is this lonely dwelling! To think that this man cannot possibly obtain anything else, even if he wanted it, *for here nothing is to be found anywhere.*

In other parts of the world a hermit or a recluse whenever pain or anguish assails him can always go away or summon assistance, but this man . . . it chills the soul to think of what must become of him during the dull winter watches, in the dismal twilight and throughout the long nights. . . .

We do not wish to abuse this lady's hospitality, and so at ten o'clock, the meal-time of our oarsmen, we return on board. Preparations for the removal of the statue have begun, the admiral having decided that this shall take place to-day, if possible, and that afterwards we must sail for Oceania.

At noon, the expedition for the removal of the great idol is ready to start. In the schooner's long-boat have been placed the necessary hoisting gear, a kind of improvised waggon, and a *corvée* of a hundred men, under the direction of a naval lieutenant. Alas!

I am on duty and sadly watch all these men who are about to go ashore.

At the last moment, however, the admiral sends for me. He will allow me to postpone until to-morrow the watch I should have kept to-day, on condition I bring him back an exact sketch of the *marae* before its general aspect is changed by the removal of the statue. It is amazing how useful to me a knowledge of drawing has proved during this cruise in thus obtaining extra privileges! I joyfully leap into the long-boat, which is already full of seamen, who look as happy as though they were going to a fair.

Being heavily laden, the long-boat has some difficulty in making its way through the reefs, along a different channel, which will enable us to enter a bay somewhat nearer the *marae*. We finally arrive, but feel uneasy about the return trip, as we shall have the additional weight of the idol, and it will certainly be necessary to make two trips before the hundred seamen are all back on board.

The natives, collected on the shore, raise piercing cries on our approach. Yesterday, the news of the coming removal of the statue spread amongst them and they have come from all parts to watch us; there are also some who live near the bay of La Pérouse, on

the other side of the island; consequently, many new faces are to be seen.

The officer in command of the *corvée* insists on his hundred men proceeding to the *marai* in orderly file, the buglers playing a marching tune; this music, which has never before been heard, fills the entire populace with indescribable joy.

One of the statues, which appears less heavy and defaced than the rest, is lying there with head downwards and nose in the ground; in order to see the face, it has to be turned over. This is done with the aid of levers and by the exercise of considerable muscular effort; finally, the statue is rolled on to its back with a dull, heavy sound. This is the signal for wilder dancing on the part of the natives and more deafening cries. A score of savages leap on to the body and sport about like madmen. . . . These ancient corpses, belong to a primitive race, and lying beneath their mounds, can never have heard an uproar approaching this—unless, maybe, when these statues lost their balance through being dashed to the ground by some earthquake, or else sank to the earth from sheer old age, one by one, their faces buried in the grass.

The last statue overturned is the one we are to remove; not the whole body but only the

head, a great block weighing from four to five tons. The sailors begin to saw away at the neck. Fortunately it is a sort of volcanic stone of a rather sandy nature, and the saws work well, though they make a frightful grinding noise. . . .

* * * * *

After finishing my sketches for the admiral, in spite of the prevailing excitement, I leave the spot, for the rest of the business and the shipping of the mutilated statue do not interest me. With my friends Atamou, Petero, Marie and Iouaritaï I return to the bay and the reed-built huts to see about the repairing of the black-plumed head-dress which Houga promised he would finish this evening.

There I find the brave little savage at work, as I had hoped; he has cut off the tail of a black cock to replace the damaged feathers, and the whole work is progressing famously.

The old chief as I pass in front of his grotto beckons to me. With an engaging, confidential air he shows me some dark-looking dust, which he calls " tattoo " and is kept in a case made of dead leaves. It is tattooing powder, and, since I evidently appreciate the industry of the island of Rapa-Nui, he suggests that he should make a few light blue designs

on my legs, in exchange for my trousers which I am to give him for his trouble.

Another old man also summons me into his hut for the purpose of exchanging my box of Swedish matches for a pair of ear-rings made from a shark's spine. I shall have lots of wonderful things to take back to-night.

Overlooking this bay, which has become our headquarters, is the crater of Rano-Kaou,[1] perhaps the widest and the most regularly circular in the world. Seen from the sky this crater must present the appearance of one of those craters in the moon, which we see through our telescopes. It is an immense, magnificent coliseum, within which an entire army might easily carry through its manœuvres. The last of the kings of Rapa-Nui concealed himself therein with all his people, at the time of the Peruvian invasion; it was here that the great massacre took place. The paths leading to it

[1] In Easter Island the name of every volcano begins with *Rano*, which strictly means "pond." As a matter of fact, the deep part of all these craters has, with the lapse of time, become a marsh, from which the natives fetch water after a downfall of rain. Still, from the very fact of their using this word, the Maoris, when taking possession of the island, must have found these volcanoes already extinct and converted into reservoirs. This seems to contradict the generally accepted theory that the island has been overthrown, and reduced in size by fire since the Maoris have been living on it.—P. L.

are covered with bones, and entire skeletons are still to be found, half hidden in the grass.

As the sun is sinking beneath the horizon I return with my five friends and sit facing the sea, at the spot where we are accustomed to await the arrival of the boats. Perhaps this is to be the last time, for in the distance I perceive the long-boat returning to the schooner and the great brown head of the idol surrounded by white-clad sailors, consequently the task has been carried through successfully; and, in all probability, we shall have to leave to-morrow.[1] It is a pity, for I would gladly have made a longer stay.

* * * * *

That night, however, as I am on the point of retiring to my hammock, the commander sends for me and I divine that fresh arrangements have been made for the following day.

He informs me that the departure has been postponed for twenty-four hours. To-morrow, accompanied by a few officers, he intends to visit a distant part of the island, where there are still idols standing upright, very different from the ones we know. Probably it will be a prolonged and toilsome journey; on the

[1] The head of this idol is now in Paris, in the *Jardin des Plantes*, at one of the entrances to the Museum.—P. L.

Two similar statues may be seen outside the entrance to the British Museum.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

map which we examine together, making our measurements with a pair of compasses, the distance, as the crow flies, is six leagues, which might well represent seven or eight if we consider the detours, ascents and descents; and the same distance for the return journey. . . . He asks me if I would like to accompany him. Of course, I am dying to do so, but, alas! I am on duty to-morrow, as I have been away the whole of to-day. "Never mind, I will arrange that with the admiral." He adds laughingly: "On one condition. . . ." Oh, yes, the drawings! I must undertake to sketch the statues from different positions. . . . Anything, provided they take me with them.[1]

IV

6th January.

It is not yet four o'clock in the morning—a dark and cloudy morning—when we leave the schooner. We reach the shore before daybreak, choosing a difficult and lonely spot as our landing-place, so as not to awake the natives, who would all wish to follow. There are four of us belonging to the ship's officers—

[1] This was in 1872. Kodaks and such instruments had not been invented, and there was no one on board who took photographs.—P. L.

the commander, two other officers, and myself; the old Dane and a trusty Maori act as guides. Three sailors, accustomed to walking, make up the rear, carrying on their shoulders luncheon for the whole party. Over there, by the huts, lights are seen shining through the grass.

First, we pass close to the sinister-looking *marai* from which we took our yesterday's spoil. The entire sky is overcast except for a single opening on the eastern horizon, through which begins to pierce a faint yellow gleam, harbinger of the dawn.

In Indian file we make our way through the wet grass to the interior of the island, which we shall have to cross from one end to the other. After half an hour's walking, the sea and the distant lights of the schooner disappear from view, at the bend of a hill, and our isolation suddenly becomes more pronounced. We plunge into that central part of the island which is covered, on the commander's map, by the word TEKAOUHANGOARU, written in large letters by the Bishop of Tahiti. Tekaouhangoaru is the first of the names given by the Polynesians to this country; in all this wind and darkness it seems to indicate a condition of gloomy savagery to a yet greater extent than does the name of Rapa-Nui.

Even when there was a numerous population here, this central territory has evidently remained uninhabited. This is also the case in the other islands peopled by the Maoris, a race of fishermen and sailors living mostly by the shore; for instance, the centre of Tahiti and that of Nukahiva, in spite of superb vegetation and forests of flowers, have never been other than silent deserts. But here in Rapa-Nui are neither forests nor trees; denuded funereal-looking plains, dotted with innumerable little stone pyramids: an interminable stretch of cemeteries, to all appearance.

It is now daylight, but still the sky is very dark; a drizzling rain begins to fall, and, though we proceed steadily, the horizon remains shut in on all sides by a seemingly unending series of craters, all similar to one another, with the same cone-trunk form, the same brown colouring.

We are up to our knees in the wet grass. This grass, also, does not vary; it covers the entire extent of the island: a sort of rough-grained plant, greyish-green in tint, the woody stalk of which is adorned with tiny violet flowers. It is covered with thousands of those little insects which we in Europe call ephemera. The pyramids we continue to meet every few yards consist of rough stones that have simply

been placed on the top of one another; they are now quite black and would appear to have been there for centuries.

At last, however, we reach a valley in which the vegetation is somewhat different; there are growing in it ferns, wild sugar-cane, barren-looking mimosa bushes, and a few short shrubs which the officers recognize as being very common in Oceania, though there they grow into trees. Have human beings brought them to this island, or have they been here ever since the great mysterious beginnings of things? In the latter event, why have they remained as brushwood on this solitary spot instead of growing and covering the whole ground?

* * * * * *

About half-past nine, having crossed the island in its greatest breadth, we again see extending before us the blue lines of the Pacific. The rain has ceased, the clouds break up and the sun appears. We seem to be leaving Tekaouhangoaru, as though waking from a very nightmare of rain and darkness.

In the distance, near the sea, is something that resembles a European's dwelling. It is the third of the houses formerly built by the missionaries, says our Danish Robinson Crusoe; on this spot, called Vaihou, a happy tribe was

then living by the coast ; but now there is not a soul ; Vaihou is a wilderness and the house is falling into ruins.

At last we see the crater of Ranoraraku, at whose foot, it appears, we are to find statues different from all the rest, stranger in aspect and still upright. We are only two leagues from the end of our journey. Here, in the empty house, it is arranged that we halt for luncheon ; this will relieve the shoulders of our sailors a little earlier than they expected, and besides, we shall have some poor remnant of a roof to shelter us.

A very old and frightfully ugly woman appears at the door, then she comes towards us, a timorous smile on her face. The only living creature we have met on our way, she evidently belonged to the tribe that was once living here, and makes her home of this solitary ruin. But then, how does she live, what can she eat ? Roots and lichens, probably, along with such fish as she can catch.

* * * * *

Beyond Vaihou, the country we traverse is furrowed with footpaths which look as though crowds passed along them every day. All the same, the place is a desert ; we had been told so, and we see that it is the truth. Our native guide even informs us that, with the exception

of this old woman, not a single human being could be found within a radius of five leagues. What are we to think of such a fact ? . . . In this island everything we see is calculated to stir or alarm one's imagination.

The place we continue to approach must have been, in long past ages, some centre of worship, a temple or a necropolis, for the entire region is covered with ruins : layers of cyclopean stones, relics of thick walls, the *débris* of gigantic buildings of some sort. And the grass, growing higher and higher, covers these traces of a mysterious past, the grass with its ligneous stalks like those of the broom, always the same, and of a like pallid green tint.

Now we make our way along the shore. On beech and cliffs are terraces built of huge stones ; these were once approached by means of tiers of benches similar to those of the ancient Hindu pagodas, and on them stood heavy idols which now lie flat on the ground, their faces buried in the ruins. The Spirit of the Sands and the Spirit of the Rocks,[1] both of them guardians of the islands from invasion

[1] *Tii-Oné* and *Tii-Papa*. The names and their explanation come from the old chiefs of the island Laïvaval (Toubouai Archipelago, Polynesia), where statues of the same appearance as those on Easter Island, although not so long nor so defaced, are to be found on the seashore.—P. L.

by sea, are the characters represented by these statues in the old Polynesian theogonies.

Here, in the midst of ruins, the missionaries discovered quantities of little wooden tablets, engraved with hieroglyphics—these are now in the possession of the Bishop of Tahiti, and doubtless they would furnish a key to the great enigma of Rapa-Nui if they could be translated.

These gods are ever more numerous the nearer we approach the Ranoraraku, and their dimensions also increase; we find, on measurement, that some of them are thirty-three and even thirty-six feet long and are all cut from a single block. No longer do we find them only at the foot of the terraces, the ground is strewn with them; everywhere we see their shapeless brown forms emerge from the tall grass; their *coiffures* consisting of a sort of turban, blood-red in hue and composed of a different lava, have rolled about here and there, and now resemble huge mill-stones.

Close by a mound a heaped-up mass of calcined skulls and jawbones seems to show that human sacrifices were evidently carried on here for a prolonged period. And—another mystery—flagged roads, such as the Roman roads were, *descend right into the Ocean itself*. . . .

Skulls and jawbones, moreover, are to be found all over the island. Nowhere is it possible to remove a little earth without stirring up

some human *débris*; the whole land might be a huge charnel-house. At some dreadful period, the horror of which has come down to the old people still alive, the inhabitants of Rapa-Nui must have been *too numerous*, famishing and crowded together in an island from which there was no escape, and so wars of extermination and cannibalism took place between the various tribes. This was at a time when the very existence of Oceania was unsuspected by white men; but when Vancouver passed here, he still found, in this island which then numbered scarcely two thousand human beings, traces of camps intrenched on all the mountains, relics of fortifications and stockades at the edge of every crater.

All these cut blocks of stone, carried away and erected as statues, testify to the presence here, for centuries, of a powerful race, skilled in working in stone, and possessed of methods we cannot explain. A megalithic phase,[1]

[1] Amongst the Maoris, the Great Stone Age would appear to have extended to modern times, for the volcanic matter, of which some of their statues consist, seems anything but solid or lasting, and the idols by the seaside could not have been there for more than three or four centuries.

True, official science acknowledges that these statues are of *trachyte*, a hard resisting substance; this may be so in the case of the large figures of Ranoraraku, but not as regards the innumerable idols on the shore; I have seen these latter sawn asunder easily with wooden saws, the stone being friable and light.

during which men must have controlled forces now unknown to us, has been traversed by almost all peoples at the commencement of their history.

In other respects the island seems quite small, considering that so large a zone is filled with monuments and idols. Can it have been a sacred island to which men came from considerable distances for religious ceremonies in the ancient times of the might and splendour of Polynesia, when the kings of the archipelagoes still had war canoes large enough to brave storms on the open sea, . . . when they assembled in caverns to hold counsel together in a secret language? . . . Or is this land a shred of a once submerged continent like that of the Atlanteans? These roads leading direct into the sea would appear to indicate that such was the case; the Maori legends, however, do not mention the fact; and, whereas Atlantis, when it disappeared, formed gigantic tablelands beneath the sea, here, all around Easter Island, there immediately begin depths that cannot be fathomed. . . .

At last, a sense of fatigue, almost of anxiety, comes over us during this interminable tramp in Indian file, through the high grass and along these narrow paths, the abode of silence, mystery, and desolation. Moreover, these re-

cumbent statues we find every few yards are exactly similar to those with which we are already acquainted ; they have the same shape and face, the only difference being that they are larger.

Consequently, we ask our guide for the others that we had come to see; the statues that are still standing. . . .

You will see them shortly, he says, over there, on the side of the Ranoraraku ; they are all together in one group.

As a matter of fact, the paths now leave the coast and turn into the interior of the country, in the direction of the volcano.

At the end of an hour and a half from the time we resumed our march, after the halt at Vaihou, we begin to distinguish large upright figures casting immoderately protracted shadows on the dull, dreary stretch of grass. They have been set up in orderly fashion, and are looking in our direction, as if to inquire who we are, although we also see a few long profiles, with pointed noses, turned in other directions. Now we are close up to them ; we have not been deceived, and involuntarily we speak in lower tones as we approach.

The statues here are not at all like those we have met in great quantities along the way. Although seeming to date back to a more re-

mote period, they are the work of less childish artists, who have succeeded in giving them a certain expression; the result being that they inspire feelings of dread. Again, they have no body, being colossal heads issuing from the ground on protruding necks and looking out upon motionless empty space, as though to fathom its mystery. What human race do they represent, with their raised and pointed noses, their thin lips projecting in a disdainful or a mocking pout? They have no eyes, but only deep hollows under the brow, which is vast and noble-looking—and yet, they look as though they could see and meditate. From each side of their cheeks descend projections which may have represented *coiffures* somewhat resembling the head-covering of the sphinxes, or else flat and projecting ears. They vary in height from sixteen to twenty-six feet. Some wear necklaces, made of inlaid flint or carved tattooings.

In all probability these figures are not the work of the Maoris. According to tradition, they were there before their ancestors came to the island; those who migrated from Polynesia a thousand years ago, on landing from their canoes, evidently found that the place had long been deserted, and was guarded solely by these monster forms. What race, now gone

without leaving any memory in human history, could have lived here in the past, and how did it become extinct? . . .

Who will ever be able to tell the age of these gods? . . . All eaten away by lichen, they seem covered with the green incrustation of innumerable centuries, like the Celtic menhirs. . . . Some are fallen and broken; others, which time and the rising of the earth have buried up to the nostrils, appear to be snuffing the very soil.

The tropical noonday sun is now shining on them, intensifying their harsh expression by making their sunken orbits appear darker than ever, whilst the sloping ground lengthens their shadows on this cemetery grass. In the sky a few final patches of clouds have just broken up and melted away into the vivid magnificent blue of heaven. The wind has subsided, all around the idols is quiet and silence; besides, when the trade wind is no longer blowing, what could disturb the death-like peace of the spot or trouble its placid shroud of green, for not a soul is near, nor is there in the island a single wild beast or bird or serpent, only white and yellow butterflies and buzzing, humming insects. . . . We are now half-way up the mountain, in the midst of these great smiling stone faces; above our

heads we have the edge of the extinct crater, beneath our feet the deserted plain strewn with statues and ruins, and on the horizon a boundless ocean, with scarcely ever a ship to be seen. . . .

As I have promised, I must make hasty sketches of these dismal-looking figures, whilst my companions sleep on the grass. I am in a feverish haste to note down every aspect—in spite of the imperious demands of fatigue and sleep which I do my best to resist—to give as detailed and vivid a rendering as possible of my impressions. . . .

Indeed, we shall have to leave immediately afterwards, for the commander is uneasy—and so are we all—at the long route to be traversed before nightfall across these central solitudes. Never again shall we return to visit these gods, whose abode is in so distant and unexpected a spot.

About two o'clock, then, at the hottest hour of the day, exposed to the burning heat of the sun, we return in Indian file along those narrow paths whose existence we cannot explain, the same grass continually surrounding us, almost reaching as high as the waist.

Still, in spite of the morning showers, neither grass nor soil is even moist. How is it this land dries so quickly, and its soil becomes so

dusty in a few hours, with these vast stretches of water all around? . . . Again, when one thinks of it, there is something strange in the very fact that the island exists at all, in the midst of this mighty Ocean, which, as one might say, just moistens its coral shores and never rises above a fixed definité line. . . . And yet nothing more than the slightest sinking beneath these awful liquid masses would be needed to submerge this tiny spot of earth which for so many centuries has had the sun shining upon its nation of idols. . . . A sense of weariness grows upon me, and I feel that the soul of the ancient inhabitants of Rapa-Nui is gradually entering into my own, the longer I gaze upon the lordly circle of waters on the horizon: I share their mental anguish in presence of this enormous Ocean, and suddenly there flashes into my mind the reason why they erected, on the very edge of their desolate island, these giant figures representing the Spirit of the Sands and the Spirit of the Rocks, for the purpose of keeping in check, beneath such stern and steadfast looks, this terrible, ever-moving Power. . . .

At twilight we are back again in the inhabited region, with the schooner lying at anchor before us. The helmsmen, telescope in hand, are awaiting our arrival, and a boat is at once sent out for us. I have just a few moments

left to recline, for the last time, in front of the sea, before night descends, with my five savage friends around me, awaiting the boat which is to bear me away for ever. They seem very sad at my departure, and a genuine feeling of sorrow comes over me as I bid them farewell, for this is to be a long farewell, an eternity is soon to separate us. We are to get under sail to-morrow morning at six o'clock, and most certainly I shall never return.

* * * * *

That night, on board, I hold in my hands, for the first time, one of the hieroglyphic tablets of Rapa-Nui, belonging to the commander. It is a *speaking wood*, as the Maoris call them: a lengthened square with rounded corners, and must have been polished by some primitive method, perhaps by friction with flint. No one knows the origin of the wood, which is extremely old and dry-looking. Oh! the disconcerting and mysterious little disc whose secrets are to remain for ever inscrutable! On several rows of lines characters are engraved; they resemble Egyptian writings and represent men, animals, and various objects; one may recognize human beings, both seated and standing, fishes, tortoises, and lances. These characters immortalized that sacred language, unintelligible to other men, which the great

chiefs spoke at the councils held in the caverns. They also had an esoteric meaning, for they signified things profound and hidden, which initiate priests and kings alone could understand. . . .

The admiral again sends for me this evening —and, as yesterday and the day before, on being summoned at unexpected hours, I anticipate that something has transpired, likely to take me once again on shore.

As a matter of fact, the admiral would like to possess a stone god which satisfies certain conditions regarding shape and cast of face; as he is aware that I have seen a great deal of the interior of the huts, he wishes to know if I could procure this for him, and that speedily, early in the morning, without delaying the departure of the schooner, which has been fixed for six o'clock.

As it happens, I know of such an idol, corresponding exactly to his ideal, in the house of the old chief himself, and I undertake to return with it before the hour of getting under sail, if he will entrust me with a frock-coat to offer in exchange. Delighted at the prospect of landing once more on Rapa-Nui, before retiring to rest I prepare several phrases in the Polynesian tongue for a final chat with my savage friends.

V

7th January.

At four in the morning I set off in the admiral's boat. Fortunately the weather is mild, though the sky is dark and lowering. Every night the same thing has happened since our arrival: a dark unbroken veil retards the dawn both on land and on sea.

Once again, then, as day begins to dawn, I find myself in the midst of breakers and reefs, returning to the bay on whose shores I never expected to land again. It is still night, and the beach looks just as eerie now as on the morning of my first visit. The background over beyond the old extinct volcanoes is intensely dark, whilst faint gleams of light begin to appear on the beach. Here and there, amid the scarce outlined huts and rocks, lights shine in the grass, yellow flames dance about, and savage women are seen moving to and fro, engaged in cooking roots and yams; as we draw near, an odour resembling a blend of smoke and wild beasts' dens assails our nostrils. The nude forms and primitive attitudes revealed by these lights are calculated to plunge one's thoughts into dreams of bygone days: this is what a prehistoric dawn must have been when first it shed light on the petty activities of a human tribe in the Stone Age. . . .

Evidently on this island the women are up and about at an earlier hour than the men, for the first to notice and recognize me are Iouaritaï and Marie. Our meeting is a joyful one, for none of us thought we should ever again see each other. They run to the old chief and inform him that I wish to speak to him on urgent business. He comes out of his hut, and the bargain meets with his approval. In exchange for his idol, which two of my sailors carry off, I hand over the admiral's dainty frock-coat. This he loses no time in putting on.

Now we must hurry back to the coast. Within a few moments my friends are all out to see me again. Hougá, suddenly aroused from sleep, appears before me wrapped in a mantle of tree-bark, and then I hear Atamou come running up, and, last of all, Petero. This time it is the very last farewell; within a few hours Easter Island will have disappeared from view. Some degree of friendship had really sprung up between us, originating either in our profound differences or in our similar childlike habits.

It is almost daylight when I return on board the whale-boat with the idol. My five friends stand watching us from the beach until we disappear from sight. The old chief, who had

also come down to see me embark, slowly returns, all alone, to his hut. As I watch him, a sorry and ridiculous object in the admiral's frock-coat, from which project two long, tattooed legs, I feel that, in making such a bargain, I have been lacking in due respect and that I am guilty of treason against the whole savage race, embodied in his person.

AFTER READING MICHELET

THE sea! There seems something immense about the very word, an indescribable blend of calm and oblivion.

This is an oppressive title for a book: consequently my mind was filled with uneasy forebodings as I began to read Michelet's *Sea*, though the work is so well known.

From the very beginning, however, I was reassured by a sort of grandiose prelude, inspired by a sense of religious awe. Gradually I gave myself up to feelings of wonder and admiration.

I do not mean that this is *the whole of the sea*; no, it may be only *the sea as perceived from the shore*, but the vision has been a clear, penetrating one, and has almost succeeded in divining its inmost secrets.

As is usually the case with those who look upon the expanse of ocean for the first time, Michelet, at the outset, is filled with breathless wonder; he sees in it something hostile, some-

thing eternally destructive ; he is overwhelmed by the sense of its irresistible power to annihilate. He delights in calling it the *nuit de l'abîme*, and in giving it such names as " watery waste " or " night."

Before a seascape or a lonely moor he gives one this impression of dread, without which, after all, there could be neither understanding nor love. He feels uneasy as soon as he hears and divines the presence of "la redoutable personne." On these sands, where blossom beneath the mighty vivifying breath of heaven carpets of pink carnations and a most exquisite flora, what he sees more especially are overturned trees lying there to die, with the raging gusts beating upon them. This voice of the ocean, powerful and lulling, which I regard as the most soothing of all music, sound in *his* ears like some prolonged, implacable menace.

Moreover, he possesses in the highest degree the power to transfer his own personal emotion into the soul of his reader. To such an extent is this the case that, this very evening, from the top of a cliff—on the edge of the Bay of Biscay, where I am now living and which Michelet mentions as being so awe-inspiring—I have been looking upon the shore and the green stretch of ocean with new feelings akin

to his own. I had just been reading the first few chapters, magical paraphrases on the theme of dread and terror. The cliffs of France and Spain, stretching to right and left away in the distance, seem gaping with bleeding wounds; a cruel cutting-away process appears to have been going on everywhere, leaving exposed nothing but the framework, as it were, of pink stone; below, a waste of sand, the marvellous crumblings of dead things, and, on their dull white stretches, piles of *débris* spread out in endless lines, witnessing to the fact that a veritable orgy of destruction has been taking place for hundreds and thousands of years. . . . Under Michelet's spell, I was looking this evening with eyes different from my own; and, for the first time in my life, during the gloomy advance of a March night, I saw, as they really are, the outposts of that mighty all-devouring bed of ocean, heaped high with bones and ruins, all crushed and pulverized. . . .

And yet the great Slayer was so calm, lying slumbering there, in the grey twilight mist, so calm and gentle! Sunk in sleep, she gave forth a dim roaring sound, as of a mighty church organ; vague abysmal harmonies were heard rising from her depths; she was as alluring as remorseless repose, and appeared to

beckon to men, poor anxious creatures of a day, inviting them all to sink into her long grey veils and find therein the supreme peace of the infinite. Growing on these sands and cliffs, innumerable hardy sweet-scented little flowers sang praises to the sea, telling of the beneficent effect of her presence and the powerful stream of life she pours forth. . . . Thus, by degrees, my entire confidence and affection returned to this inscrutable and capricious charmer who, for so many years, has had charge of my life.

How calm the sea sometimes is! . . . To sail out into the open, far far away, all alone on the tranquil ocean! . . . Can any other sense of repose compare with this? . . . And the darker and gloomier the sea is, as the mist-laden days are drawing to a close beneath the shroud of a December sky, the stronger becomes the sense of tranquillity which it brings, of resignation to the thought of death, of oblivion and universal forgiveness. Even its anguish and its horrible lashings seem to manifest, in some form, that mighty peace which soothes, strengthens, and revivifies the soul of man. As it is the great battlefield on which sailors retain their simple nature and acquire indomitable courage, so also is it the proud and secret cloister, the sovereign refuge

of those lonely ones who have lost faith in life. . . .

In the early chapters of Michelet's book, which might be called "chapters of awe and terror," there is an admirable description of a storm, which I was specially moved and surprised on reading, so little did I expect to find an account of that superb tempest which raged in October 1859, the first my eyes ever saw and my ears heard! It has left a profound and sinister impression on the memory of those who lived by the coast, and it is with a dim sense of horror and dread that I recall it myself.

I was not aware that Michelet had, at any period of his life, visited my own part of France, though, as it happened, he was then living in the hamlet of Saint-Georges-de-Didonne, where I had been taken for the summer season. At the very time that I, a little child, was terror-stricken before this raging fury which I had never before seen unchained, he was quite close at hand, storing up his impressions for glorious use in after years.

Above all, there remains in my mind the following sombre picture. During one of those horrible lulls in the storm, some tall person or

other wrapped his cloak round me, and, to avoid being carried away by the raging wind, sheltered behind a wall, trying the while to look out on to the open. I also tried to look out, though I was blinded by the tempest that lashed my face and left me breathless. An infernal awe-inspiring music kept me in a sort of stupor. Near at hand were two women who lived on the coast, sheltering behind the same wall, tightly clasping each other and endeavouring to fold more tightly about them their black cloaks which swelled and beat together with a sound like the cracking of a whip ; like us, they were watching the terrible sight, and one of them uttered a kind of dull moan which could be heard in spite of the wind. . . .

In my opinion, Michelet's description cannot be surpassed. True, it was *from the shore* that he saw this storm, as he saw all other things connected with the sea, more or less, but he gives us so vivid an impression of its general aspect and its uproar, its darkness and intensity, the brine and the spray, that, after reading him, we feel moved to the inmost fibre of our being.

Gradually, as one turns the leaves of the book, one feels that the author is entering into closer communion with his awe-inspiring model. He

acquiesces in the calm fatality of her ravages, her patient ever-recurring creations. Finally, he becomes smitten with a kind of dread love for the mighty Slayer and Creatress; he acclaims her as the friend, the mother and sustainer of all life.

From the chapter entitled *Fécondité* onwards, he shows himself to be a unique and highly-gifted poet. I do not think it possible to give a more powerful impression of ocean depths, where life rises from its dark, stony slumber, the mad frenzy of existence ever present in the waters, the great organic urge, incessantly rising from the profound darkness below. Still, although Michelet speaks of "the justifiable expectation that we shall live again in our immortal souls," throughout the whole of this part of his work we have a sombre, magnificent sense of death; matter here reveals herself as the formidable, eternal mistress of her own transformations, the ruler of all things. To such passages one might apply the very phrase our author addresses to the sea, "Cela fait peur."

He goes so far as to attribute to this sea of his a kind of vague animality, of conscious maternity—and this he expresses in language peculiar to himself, each word of which is pregnant with significance.

Afterwards, in a series of chapters under such strange headings as *Fleur de sang* or *Faiseurs de mondes*, and which are as vivid as the changing tints of mother-of-pearl, Michelet delights in marvellous descriptions of the endless variety of marine treasures. Here, the book becomes a sort of natural history, written by a poet and generalized by a thinker.

The fact that he is able to depict so realistically this insubstantial watery world, which he can in reality have known only as colourless and dead, fills me with wonder and admiration. He has frequented only the somewhat scanty coasts of the cold seas off the coast of France, and the shells and bones, the *débris* of the thousands of beings he describes, have been found on the gloomy-looking shelves of museums, so that the most wonderful artistic intuition alone could have enabled him to interpret their colour and life as he has done.

One would think he had himself explored the marvellous seas of coral around the equator, with their lazily-rolling billows, heavy with the life they hold enclosed, eternally slumbering beneath the rolling storm clouds or under the glory of a burning sun.

I remember one evening, on my first sea-voyage, when I was more closely than usual in contact and communion with the vital

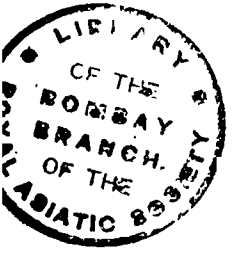
powers present in these seas. We were in the middle of the Atlantic, under the equator, in a region of heavy warm downpours of rain such as must have fallen when the world was young. It was the decline of one of those exceptional days when every veil between sky and sea was removed. Not a cloud or even a breath of wind; as it happened, the eternal Baal was darting his rays through a deep azure sky, and all was glory and enchantment. In the immense glowing void, two ships lay motionless, becalmed day after day, slowly rocked on the bosom of the sea: our own, and a strange vessel, away on the warm limpid horizon.

Between four and five in the afternoon, just as the sun was beginning to cover the waters with gold, I was ordered to go in a tiny boat and visit this other ship, which had signalled to us. When midway, with the two motionless ships in the distance, the one in front and the other behind, I became aware that I was engaged in a most imposing and solemn *tête-à-tête* with the great silent deep. Alone in that frail boat with its low sides, urged on by six sailors all languid with the heat, I, a solitary insignificant being, was making my way over a sort of heaving watery waste, a smooth blue mother-of-pearl surface, streaked with gold. There was

a mighty swell, howbeit gentle and soothing, beneath our boat, as we continued to advance with the same peaceful flow, rolling from one horizon to the other—long smooth undulations, immense risings of water following one another with rhythmic slowness, like the back of some gigantic beast, whose very indolence renders it harmless. Gradually and without any will of our own, we rose upon one of these fleeting blue crests ; then we caught a momentary glimpse of the magnificent expanse of sea, flooded with light, whilst all the time we had the uneasy impression of being borne aloft by something fluid and unstable, something that would speedily disappear. The swell soon passed away, with the same gliding motion, the same treacherous gentleness, and once again we were in the trough of the wave. All this took place in utter silence, without the slightest shock or sound. We were not even quite certain that it was ourselves who were going down ; a slight feeling of dizziness made us wonder if it was not rather the very horizon that was plunging into the depths beneath. . . . Again we found ourselves in the hollow of one of those liquid valleys between two moving and shining mountains—the one in retreat, from which we had just glided so smoothly, and the other, exactly like it,

approaching threateningly. This sun-kissed water, with its dull oily appearance, rocked our boat on its bosom like a tiny feather; it was of such intense blue that one would have said it had been painted pure indigo. If we leaned over the side of the boat to take a little in the hollow of the hand, we saw that it was full of myriads of tiny plants or insects, literally swarming with living things. Around us were numbers of those shell-fish called argonauta, carelessly gliding along with all sails set; everywhere was a profusion of floating medusae, each spreading out a little transparent carmine-tinted sail to catch some imperceptible breeze or other, giving the effect of handfuls of pink crystals that have been scattered over the surface of this blue expanse of ocean. . . .

Then did the sea appear before my eyes as Michelet saw it—the mighty crucible of life, whose "conceptions are unceasing, and whose births never-ending."



THE END

Printed by R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, *Edinburgh.*

00099235

Digitized with financial assistance from
Shri Brihad Bhartiya Samaj
on 20 February, 2020